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Charlie S.

1905

IN THE
SADDLE WITH GOMEZ.

BY
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TO THE MEMORY OF
CHARLES A. DANA,
CUBA'S BEST FRIEND,
THIS BOOK
IS GRATEFULLY DEDICATED.



PREFACE.

SEVERAL of the stories which form this book were originally published in the "Illustrated American." It would have been easy for the author to have increased the number of pages which he now offers in this volume by simply relating the misery, the agony and the non-exaggerated martyrdom which the Cuban people have suffered in their struggle for liberty.

He has refrained from so doing, as the American public is fully aware of that horrible drama, and also because his intentions have been to avoid describing such somber scenes.

THE AUTHOR.



IN THE SADDLE WITH GOMEZ.

I.

MY FIRST BATTLE.

TO-MORROW we would meet the enemy. General Gomez had called his officers together, and the plans of the battle had all been discussed and arranged.

I had joined the general's escort only the day before, had not as yet been in a fight or skirmish of any kind, and, like all men of my age, I longed for the rattle of musketry and the odor of burned powder.

Now, as I lay on the ground wrapped in my blanket before the fire, in front of which some pieces of beef were slowly roasting (my breakfast for the following morning, I began to think over the incidents of the day and of the coming battle.

New to a soldier's life, everything had a charm for me.

We had made a long and tiresome march, and my weary bones ached painfully; the ground seemed harder than ever, and in astonishment I gazed at the sunburned warriors around me, wondering how they could appear so comfortable and sleep so soundly while I, from sheer weariness and excitement, could scarcely close my eyes. How was it that they, on the eve of a battle which was to decide the fate of so many, could appear so unconscious and indifferent? I wanted to talk, to ask questions; it was only the idea of appearing unsoldierly that kept me from giving vent to my feelings.

So to-morrow I would be under fire for the first time! What would I do? How would I feel?

Would I be able to stand up to my duty like a man, or would I find myself quaking with fear at the first sound of the musketry? All the stories I had ever read of battles came up

before me, and I remembered tales of men of indomitable courage whose first experience had been that of abject cowardice, whose inclinations had been to seek safety in flight.

Perhaps it all meant death, and that to-morrow I should be lying stark and stiff in some wayside ditch, a forgotten part of the little band, and die as many another soldier had perished in his first encounter with the enemy.

I pictured to myself, as I lay there, a rough field—the scene of the battle; overhead hung huge clouds of smoke, through which the rays of the sun could scarcely pierce; the dead and wounded, mingled in horrible confusion with mutilated horses, useless machetes and guns, and on every side sorrow, pain, blood and desolation.

I could see the body of a boy, shot through the breast. On his face an expression of agony still lingered, while one hand was pressed to his wound, his shirt stained dark-red, marked where his life-blood had slowly ebbed away, and his wide-open lids showed

his glassy, motionless eyes, which no kind hand would close ere his body would be thrown hurriedly into an unmarked grave.

Slowly the embers of the fire grew dimmer and dimmer; and calmed by the stillness of the camp, I fell asleep.

I awoke to the sound of "reveille." Hastily saddling my horse and rolling my blanket, I soon took my place in the line.

In the distance could be seen the enemy's forces slowly approaching, the rising sun shining on their equipments: one long, black line, looking for all the world like a huge serpent, which seemed to extend itself far on the plains.

A sound like a thunder-clap rent the air—the enemy's challenge.

General Gomez, together with his staff and escort, were posted well to the south of the field. On the west side was General A. Maceo, with some one hundred and fifty horse, while to the east were four hundred cavalrymen under the orders of Major Cepero. Away down the field was the infantry, deployed in

line of skirmishers, four hundred strong: the famous Oriental infantry,—men who had fought for three months, day by day, and who knew not what fear was, though now driven well-nigh desperate, for fortunate was he who had a completely-filled ammunition pouch.

Our fate—the fate of Cuba and her people—was to be decided; the men knew it, and fought only as men can who see their brothers every moment cheerfully give up their lives for their country.

The battle waged fiercely; our men, outnumbered, were fast being driven back, and as I looked with excited eyes on the scene I heard General Gomez say to an aide: “Tell General Maceo to charge the left flank, Major Cepero the right, and I, with my escort, will charge the front. At the bugle-call the infantry will cease firing.”

As the bullets whizzed by, shells shrieked, and men dropped, something seemed to clutch at my heart; the perspiration stood out on my face, my knees shook, my feet rattled against

the stirrups; everything swam before me. I tried to speak, but could not, for my tongue felt as if it had turned into lead.

I argued with myself, called myself a coward, and tightened the grip on my machete: all of no use. I was seized with the fright of a soldier who is about to enter into action, and who knows that possibly death awaits him.

Suddenly our captain gave the order to charge; forward we went. The thundering of a thousand hoofs seemed to echo in my head, intermingled with the roar of the artillery, the rattle of our arms, and the cries and oaths of the men.

The sensations of a moment before had left me, and I now urged my horse on, my machete in my hand, shrieking and shouting. My blood seemed on fire. A volley from the Spanish square. For a moment we hesitated; then faster, faster, harder and harder, like a human avalanche, we tore across the field, until with a crash we broke into the square!

Carried away by the impulse and enth-

siasm, by the cries and yells, I continuously spurred my horse on; a mist seemed to cover my eyes; I knew not what I was doing, but blindly thrust, parried and cut.

A face loomed up before me—a pale, desperate, horror-stricken one, and as I cut at it and felt something warm wet my hand I gave a wild yell of joy. My man rolled to the ground between my horse's hoofs. Forward I went, never turning my head, only trying to clear my way and to avoid being surrounded by the Spanish infantry.

My horse and myself seemed to obey the same instinct of preservation. How long I remained in that scene of carnage I do not know. The notion of time was lost to me.

Panting, with parched throats and haggard faces, we obeyed the call of "assembly;" again the fit of trembling seized me, and my teeth chattered so that I could hardly answer to the roll-call. I was completely prostrated; I could not even lift my arm, and felt a horrible thirst.

Then for the first time I felt a severe pain in the right hip. In the struggle some one had hit me. When and how it happened I know not. My companions crowded around and congratulated me on my baptism of fire. Smiling, I gave them my hand, stained by the blood of men unknown to me, whose names I will never learn. All would have seemed a dream, but the wounded and dead who surrounded us convinced me that it was a reality—the horrible reality of war.

All during that day I felt a profound sadness. I wanted to meet that man—the first who had wished to kill me; the first whom I cut from my path with my machete—and to offer him all that I could to relieve him. Little by little I forgot him, and now when I wish to recollect him I can picture in my mind only his two eyes full of hate, round and small, like those of a bird of prey.

The day had been won. The Spaniards, thoroughly routed, were beating a hasty retreat, not even stopping to bury their dead

Order and discipline were forgotten in their ranks; some men took refuge in a neighboring canefield, from whence, when the torch was applied, their cries of anguish could be heard; others more sensible surrendered, who after being disarmed were duly set at liberty.

At one end of the field stood the brave old general, around him grouped his staff; in front were two large piles of captured guns and ammunition boxes. On every face joy was painted. Nearly four hundred Spaniards lay dead on the field, two hundred and seventy-five Mausers had been captured, together with three hundred and fifty thousand rounds of ammunition. Our losses had been comparatively small; but a cloud marred the joy of many.

Major Cepero had deserted. Too much of a coward to obey the general's order, he had preferred dishonor and disgrace, and in the heat of the action had turned and fled. Then, and then alone, was it that we learned that the glory of the victory was due to Gomez.

Cepero's courage had failed him, Maceo's charge was stopped by a series of wire fences, and to General Gomez, with one hundred and fifty men, was due the glory of breaking a Spanish square four files deep, thus snatching victory from where defeat alone appeared.

"Long life to General Gomez!" was the resounding cry of all during that, to me, ever memorable day.

II.

INSURGENTS AMBUSCADING A SPANISH FORCE.

I HAVE seen many brave men go down amid a rain of bullets, fighting to the last. I have seen them go into places, and carry out orders, knowing it would cost them their lives, and never flinch or hesitate; but of all these the death of one is most engraven on my mind.

One of our young comrades was Charles Hooker, a happy, handsome boy of nineteen. From the very moment his name was entered on the roll he became a favorite with all, from the highest officer to the last orderly.

Tall and slim of stature, his brown hair was thick and curly, and his eyes were black, with such an innocent look in them that you could not help but wonder how he could accustom himself to a life in which death played so

strong a hand. Good-natured, with always a kind word of encouragement, he yet had so firm a sense of duty that everybody looked up to him.

He had already seen much hard service, and at the time I write of wore the stars of a second lieutenant, emblems which he had won in battle.

Late in the afternoon of July 6th, in the past year, all was bustle and noise in the camp. Bugle-calls were heard, the men ran hither and thither, and the cries of the orderlies, mingling with the loud orders of the officers, had thrown the quiet camp into a state of uproar.

"I wonder what we are up to now?" shouted Hooker, as he tightened the girth on his horse.

"Don't know; I guess we will soon find out. Come on or you'll be late for formation," I answered, springing into the saddle and trotting down to my place in the line.

Horses were saddled, straps tightened, and equipments hastily buckled on. The line was soon formed, and as we stood at attention while

Captain Planas was inspecting us we were wondering why we were called out at so late an hour; for it was five o'clock, and all of us knew that at that time no danger was to be feared from the enemy.

"Squadron! Right by fours! Column right! March!" rang out in rapid succession, and we slowly walked our horses out of the camp, noticing, as we did so, that only two squadrons beside our own were leaving, and that all the "impedimenta," together with the rest of the force, remained behind.

"Rout order" soon followed, and the buzz of some three hundred voices filled the air.

Hooker and I had just commenced our dinner when the bugle sounded "boots and saddles," and now as we rode side by side our conversation naturally turned to that all-important subject in a soldier's life—our appetites and empty stomachs.

I lamented the fate which had forced us to abandon what would have been a most welcome meal, and attempted to impress Hooker with

the seriousness of the situation and my pre-occupation as to where our next meal was to come from.

He laughed merrily at the condition of my mind, and strove to infuse me with some of his good spirits. But I was not to be consoled, and continued to grumble.

Slowly we rode along, and as hunger is not a very good promoter of conversation, it soon lagged, and the silence was only broken by the tramp of the horses' hoofs and an occasional remark from one of the men.

Disgust at the prospect of spending a long, cold night without a fire, joined to the gnawing of an empty stomach, had succeeded in throwing me into a wretched humor, and as I rolled over in my blanket, and answered with a grunt Hooker's cheerful "Good-night" I mentally made a vow to make some one pay for my feelings on the morrow.

Slowly the sentries paced up and down, looking with drowsy eyes on their sleeping comrades. Silence reigned, broken only now and

then by the croak of a bullfrog in some distant pond or the noise of the leaves in the tall palm trees as the wind softly rustled them. Large clouds blew up, and for a moment covered the moon. Some drops of rain began to fall, but still the tired men slept on, Captain Planas alone remaining awake: the responsibility of the ambush lay on his shoulders, and, young in command, he felt too anxious to rest.

“Three o’clock,” he muttered, as he glanced at his watch. “Sentry, pass the word to wake the men—and no one is to talk,” he added, addressing the nearest guard.

“Now, men,” he continued, as we hastily sprang to our feet, “you are not to fire until I command, no matter what happens. Fire low and true. Remember that I have pledged my word to capture the convoy, and I know that I can count on you all. Let each man choose his tree, and above all, no noise, and await the order; then, aim well, and fire.”

Silently the men took their places, and for a moment the click of springs could be heard as

we examined our Winchesters ; then, once more all was still.

The first rays of dawn were lighting up the sky when, at the turn of the road, some four hundred yards away, a solitary horseman came in sight—the advance scout of the convoy. Slowly he came on, looking from side to side, his gun shining in his hand.

How handsome and soldierly he looked, I thought, as his horse carefully picked its way along the stony road ; at that moment a hundred rifles were probably leveled at him, awaiting but the word and a touch of the finger to speed their messengers of death on their way.

Nearer and nearer he came ; behind him could be seen some one hundred men—the vanguard. Already the first scout was abreast of the ambush. Would he see us ? If so, all was lost. We heard the creaking of his equipments as he almost brushed us on his way by. Now the main body was in sight ; in the middle of which were twenty or thirty pack-mules—the coveted convoy.

I glanced at Hooker at my side. His patient manner never seemed to abandon him; but the color that came and went on his fair cheeks, together with a hasty look which now and then he cast at our captain, told me that, although he could control his feelings, he was as impatient as I for the fight to begin. All knew that the moment for action was fast approaching.

There was the tramp, tramp of the troops as with a steady shuffle on they came.

My blood rushed to my head, a choking sensation seized my throat. I held my breath lest it should betray us. I could feel every pulse in my body throb as crouched behind my tree I aimed and awaited the signal.

Still on they came. Twenty feet away was the commanding officer, his eyes and ears on the alert. God! would the order ever come?

At last! "Fire!" and the roar of three hundred rifles rent the air, re-echoing through the woods; the shouts of the officers and surprised men, the clatter of hoofs and the sharp notes

of the bugle, threw the peaceful scene of a moment before into the confusion and noise of battle.

At the first volley, taken by surprise, the enemy gave way; but now they rallied and returned our fire. It was give and take, and I knew we were in for a hard, stubborn fight.

A square was formed by the Spaniards, in the middle of which were placed the loaded mules. As fast as one went down his carcass was dragged to the front, and soon a formidable rampart was formed, from behind which the enemy knelt and fired.

The order had been given by Captain Planas, and we had closed in, surrounding completely the square.

Side by side Hooker and I fought, and as occasionally I caught sight of him through the smoke I saw him firing, his hat off, his long hair blowing in the wind, and his cheeks rosy with the excitement of battle.

Frantically the surrounded enemy fought, and the air resounded with the crack of the

the and the whizz of the bullet as it sped on its way.

On all sides men went down; some lay still, while others writhed and groaned in frightful agony, calling on their more fortunate companions to end their misery; while in the midst calmly stood Captain Planas, bending now and then to soothe a wounded comrade, urging and encouraging his men, unmindful of his own safety.

Cries of derision and defiance came from the square, answered by similar ones from us.

Suddenly a shout went up. Over-confident, Captain Planas had advanced too near; a bullet had struck him in the breast, and he fell, calling on us to avenge him.

Dismayed at our loss, we hesitated, and began to yield; a panic seemed to seize us, and death of which we had not thought before, now appeared in all its horror.

The Spaniards, seeing our condition, took courage, and poured their deadly volleys into our thoroughly disheartened ranks. Defeat

and disgrace stared us in the face; the battle seemed lost. But it was willed otherwise.

An American boy was to save the day. Grasping Cuba's torn and tattered flag of victory in one hand, his machete in the other, Hooker called on the men to follow him, and looking neither to right nor left, he dashed headlong into the square. The men, by one common impulse, obeyed, and a horrible scene of carnage ensued, the roar of musketry giving way to the clash of steel.

In the center of the square stood the Yankee boy, the blood running down his face from a cut on his forehead, his eyes shining with the light of a brave man, who fears not death, but dishonor.

In his hand he still held the flag for which he was dying, while with his machete he kept at bay a burly Spaniard, who cut and slashed at him. All around, men fought and fell; the weakest heart grew strong and the hand struck true as the men gazed on their brave young leader.

Like wild beasts we fought and killed, well-nigh exhausted by our efforts, and desperate at the loss of our captain.

The onslaught was too strong to resist; the enemy broke and ran. The day was won.

But how much had it cost us! For as I looked I saw Hooker standing for a moment amid the dead and dying, a ray of light, as it stole through the smoke, lighting up his pale but happy face; slowly he sank back, the flag pressed to his bosom, and as with uncovered head I knelt by his side, he smiled and passed away.

That night, as in a far-off land, a mother's prayers went up to Heaven for her son, we sadly laid him to rest, wrapped in the flag for which he had braved death and died.

III.

THE STORY OF GENERAL JOSE MACEO'S DEATH.

UNDER a large cedar tree, a pile of stones, surmounted by a plain wooden cross with the words, "A Hero: José Maceo," roughly carved, are all that mark the spot where lie the remains of one of Cuba's bravest soldiers, awaiting the day when a fitter monument shall be erected to show where he fell, fighting for the liberty of his country.

It was after a long and tiresome march that I first met Major-General José Maceo. We had landed a few weeks previously in Cuba, and it being our duty to report to him, we immediately set out. After passing through many hardships, we finally accomplished our object, joining him at Coralillo, a spot some thirty miles west of Guantanamo.

He rode out at the head of his escort to greet us, his tall, well-knit body swaying in perfect grace with every motion of his horse, the large brim of his hat pinned back and held in place by an *escarapela*. He was dressed in brown duck, and wore large, black riding boots, his rifle slung across his shoulder and his dreaded machete strapped to his side. He looked every inch the warrior that he was.

After addressing us a few words of welcome, we were assigned to a place in his camp; and, asking us to dinner, he rode off, followed by his staff.

That evening at six o'clock, accompanied by a friend, I went to his hut. After dining, and when he had heard our own experiences, he then, at our request, related to us the following account, by which one can well judge the character and iron will of the man:

They landed, his brother Antonio, Flor Crombert, Cebreco, Agramonte, four others and himself, at ten o'clock in the morning, in plain view of the garrison which occupied the

forts of Baracoa. Immediately arming themselves, and always in sight of the city, they marched up a small hill and took possession of a house, to await the attack of the Spaniards, whose force, ten times their own in number, could by this time be seen leaving the city.

As soon as the troops reached the foot of the hill they were met by a well-directed volley, which was kept up without ceasing until the Spaniards retreated, abandoning all hope of capturing them for the time being. After this skirmish the party continued their march.

From that moment there commenced for the little band a most desperate and rough campaign. Knowing that they were pursued, a halt or delay of any kind was dangerous. To be captured then meant a prison-cell, from whence, after a mock trial, they would be dragged out and shot down like dogs; so they trudged along as well as circumstances would allow.

The third day their guide deserted, leaving

them lost and wandering in the dense forest. After forty-eight hours of uncertain and trying marches, a small hut was reached, where, unfortunately, it was decided to rest. A few hours later the Spaniards came up and completely surrounded them, opening fire from all sides of the camp.

A desperate hand-to-hand fight ensued, in which Flor Crombert was killed, together with two others; Agramonte was taken prisoner, and José Maceo barely managed to cut his way through and escape uninjured.

In the skirmish the little party had all been separated, and Maceo now found himself alone without food or drink. He was weary with his long tramp, his clothes were in threads, his torn and bleeding feet covered with rags, and he did not know in which direction to turn, encircled as he was by enemies.

Yet, not for one moment did his pluck and grit abandon him. To have heard, as I did, from his own lips the story of his wanderings and sufferings during thirteen days, told in

his quiet, simple way, without a word of bravado or boast, one could not but admire the man who, after having fought ten years, was still ready to go through all these hardships once more.

During those long days he suffered horribly from hunger and thirst, living on sour oranges and such berries as he found in his path, until at last, well-nigh dead, he fell in with the forces of General Perquito Perez.

General Maceo was a man of quick temper, and acted on the spur of the moment, but when he found he had committed a mistake no one was more prompt than he to apologize and atone for it, were it to his humblest soldier.

He stammered somewhat, especially when he was angry; then it was almost impossible to understand him. In battle he would cross his leg over the pommel of his saddle and wait patiently for an opportunity to use his Winchester; he was a wonderful shot, and God help the unfortunate Spaniard at whom he would aim!

He was constantly being wounded. At the time I met him he already wore seventeen scars; nevertheless, he was always the first in a charge and the last in a retreat.

The following account of General José Maceo's death I have from a brother officer who was present at the time:

“At four A. M., on July 5, 1896, the bugle sounded ‘reveille,’ and I awoke to be informed by my orderly that we were preparing to go into action, and that the troops, some two thousand strong, were advancing on us.

“Hardly had I mounted when a messenger rode up, ordering me to join the general's staff and serve as aid to him. This I did, never leaving his side until he dropped from his horse.

“We were camped at the foot of Lorna del Gato (Cat Hill), by which the large highway passed; on our left lay a small field, dotted here and there with palm trees, while to the right was a large and dense forest.

“The Spaniards were approaching from the

38 IN THE SADDLE WITH GOMEZ.

north; so, placing the cavalry back of the hill for protection, and deploying some eight hundred men across the road and field, we patiently awaited the enemy's pleasure.

"The moments stole by and silence reigned. A shot from the outposts, another and another; Maceo's last fight had commenced.

"The enemy came on quickly, and the firing began all down the line. They opened on us with two field-pieces; their shells, however, went wild and did but little damage.

"Already our men were dropping; the wounded were being carried to the rear, bullets whistled, shells shrieked and the cries of the wounded filled the air. A young lieutenant was shot near the general, who never moved.

"Suddenly we broke; Maceo saw it, and putting spurs to his horse, he galloped down the line, followed by his staff, to rally and encourage the men. A bullet hit Maceo's charger, which, with its rider, rolled over in the dust. The general was up in a second,

mounting Lieutenant-Colonel Bonne's horse, which a few moments later was shot through the ear, the bullet just grazing Maceo's hand.

"The Spaniards were fighting furiously. The only thing to keep them back was a charge, and when we slowly trotted back of the hill to join the cavalry each one of us knew that the supreme moment had arrived.

"In a low voice the general gave his commands, and as we dashed around the hill he rode well in front, his long, heavy machete shining in the air. The enemy saw us coming, and hurriedly formed their squares.

"On—on, faster and faster we rode. A volley from the square, answered by cries of '*Al machete! Al machete!*' Men dropped from their saddles and riderless horses dashed by; twenty yards more and we would be on them.

"Another volley, and the general reeled in his saddle, straightened up and then pitched headlong to the ground, shot through the head.

"Tenderly they picked him up and carried

him back of the lines. An hour later I rode up and found him lying on the ground, surrounded by his officers, unconscious, and slowly dying.

“At three o’clock in the afternoon, as the last shots of the retiring enemy could be heard in the distance, Maceo slowly turned his head and muttered:

“ ‘*Al machete! Al machete!*’ ”

Thus did Major-General José Maceo die, the hero of La Indiana, La Galleta, El Jobito, Pinar Redondo, Majaguabo, San Luis, Dos Caminos, Sao del Indio, El Triunfo, Canto Abajo, Mayare, Arroyo Hondo, Sagua, Songo and a dozen other battles, and last of all, Lorna del Gato, where, like a true soldier, he fell, as eleven of his brothers had done before, fighting the Spaniards, dying cheerfully for that cause which he had always so nobly defended.

IV.

HOW I ONCE WORE THE SPANISH UNIFORM.

It was a risky task, and the chances were one in a hundred of making a success of it; but nobody stopped to think of that, for the game was well worth the candle, and there was enough excitement to satisfy the most adventurous and daring spirit among us.

The following were Major Leoncio Vidal's plans: We were to ride down to the Camajuani Railroad, block the morning train with its carload of *guardia-civiles*, compel them to surrender, dress ourselves in their uniforms, enter the town on the train, disguised in that manner, burn it, and then beat a retreat.

All this was to take place in broad daylight, with only thirty men at our disposal, and on

the sixteenth day of March, in the year of our Lord eighteen hundred and ninety-six.

Fun enough, we all thought, and that night, as we sat around our campfires, the woods resounded with the voices of our little band, all laughing merrily at the joke we were about to play on our friends the *gringos*.

The following morning, at the first note of "reveille," the men sprang to their feet, and in a few minutes we were all ready, every one eager for the coming lark.

In a short while we were *en route* for the appointed spot, Major Vidal and I making our number a round thirty; but no one thought of our strength, feeling sure of victory.

Major Vidal and his band may well be compared with Marion and his men. He was greatly feared by our foes, being a great guerilla fighter, and as brave a man as ever wore the rebel cockade. He would strike a blow and be miles away, laughing over its success, almost before the drowsy Spaniards awoke to the fact that he had been in their midst.

Before the war he was a resident of Camajuani, a town noted for its loyalty to Spain, and he never lost an opportunity of reminding them of that fact, keeping the inhabitants in a constant state of terror by frequently dashing into the town or firing on the forts—"keeping up his circle of acquaintances," as he called it.

Poor fellow! soon after the little incident which I shall attempt to relate he lost his life while entering the town of Santa Clara. When the news of his death reached Camajuani the joy of the people knew no bounds. The town was decorated with the hated flag; a ball was given, the opening feature of which was a torchlight parade; at the head was carried a dummy labeled "Leoncio Vidal," and men whom he once honored by calling them his friends marched behind it.

But that is another story, and I am forgetting myself. The men looked fighters, every inch of them, dressed in their rough duck suits (somewhat the worse for wear, and not over-clean), and with their broad panama hats

thrown back off the forehead; even the horses—faithful little friends—many of which bore the scars of former escapades, looked particularly “scrappy” as they rattled their bits, wondering where we were going and impatient to arrive.

It was one of those mornings which can never be forgotten. Overhead was the beautiful clear blue sky of the tropics, the air was cool and full of the perfume of wild flowers, and the birds chirped merrily to one another from the branches above, as moved by the wind they swayed to and fro—a morning which makes one’s thoughts fly back to home and peace, and causes a sigh to escape from the lips as one awakes to the sterner reality of war and death.

Vidal and I rode next to each other at the head of our men, he giving me his orders for the day’s work.

“What’s that tin can doing there strapped to your saddle?” I asked, noticing a long cylindrical affair hanging by the side of his leg.

“That,” he answered, with a broad grin, “is a secret. You will learn its use soon enough.”

A short while afterward we arrived at the track; the troop dismounted, tied their horses to trees and formed, awaiting orders.

I looked at my watch; half-past five. Our train was not due before eleven o'clock, so we had plenty of time in which to do the work carefully.

Vidal had chosen a spot which if made to order would not have suited our purpose better. On one side of the railroad rose a tall embankment, while on the other the earth lay smooth and bare as a billiard-ball. Fifty yards further up, the track curved sharply around a wood, which would screen us from view until it was too late for the engineer to avoid the trap. Away in the distance loomed the church steeple of Camajuani, from the cross of which floated Spain's flag.

Sentinels were posted some distance apart on both sides of the railroad, and the men

rapidly set to work loosening nails and heaping obstructions upon the track.

Let me describe for the benefit of the reader what an armored Spanish train means.

A few months previous to the time of which I write General Gomez had issued a proclamation stating that he forbade traffic of any kind upon the railroad, and that fifteen days after date disobedience of orders would be at the risk of life.

The Spanish government pool-pooled the idea, but saw fit, however, to take their precautions, which they did in the following manner. An accident, such as being blown up by a dynamite bomb, could not, of course, be avoided, and they decided to fortify the trains so as to make their capture a thing almost impossible—by placing behind the engine a car full of soldiers, thoroughly equipped to do battle with a regiment.

The four sides of the car were covered with steel plates punctured by diamond shaped loop holes, but, in their sagacity, or may be not

deeming it necessary, the Spaniards forgot to cover the roof in a like manner.

This was their only vulnerable point, but one of which we meant to take advantage, the blockade being so placed as to bring the protected car directly underneath the embankment from which we intended to fire.

At eight o'clock the work was finished, and the order was given to prepare breakfast.

Now a morning's ride and labor like that which we had done would sharpen the appetite of any man, and I felt in a condition to do honor to the most doubtful morsel. Presently my orderly, André, stood before me with a can of condensed milk in one hand, while in the other he held a couple of much-charred and veteran-like sweet potatoes.

I sat up and proceeded to make the most of my meal. It may be said I did justice to it, and in a short while nothing remained to tell the tale but an empty tin can and the burned skin of roasted potatoes.

A few minutes later I walked over and joined

Vidal, who still lingered over his frugal meal.

“We ought to make a success of this job,” he said, looking with a suspicious eye upon a “shady” morsel; “those beggars will not see the block until it is too late to stop.”

“But,” I exclaimed, accepting and lighting a cigarette, “suppose they run their engine into that block; it will jump the track, and then we will not be able to enter Camajuani as you intend.”

“Why, that stuff would never cause the engine to jump the rail. Of course, the driver will see it the minute he comes around the curve, and he will reverse the engine. The obstacle will only serve to bring the train to a complete stop. What we must do is to fire as accurately as possible through the roof and blow the scoundrels out of the car if they don’t surrender. The rest is mere child’s-play.”

I didn’t quite see where the “child’s-play” came in, but of course I refrained from saying so.

"That train is due in twenty minutes," he added, glancing at his watch, "so you had better call in the sentinels and post the men."

I turned to obey his orders, noticing as I did so that he took a long fuse out of his pocket, and I wondered where he had obtained the dynamite, and why he had not mentioned its acquisition to me.

The work had been well done. Enough rubbish was piled on the track to hinder the progress of the engine without causing a derailment, while further back several nails were loosened, to enable us to remove a rail after the train had passed, and in that manner prevent it from shunting out of the trap.

The sentries were soon collected, each man allotted his position, ordered to lie flat on the ground, and when the signal to fire was given to blaze away at the top of the car.

By this time "Old Sol" was getting almost unendurable, the back of my neck feeling anything but pleasant, and I mentally blessed the tradition which makes all trains late as the

hands of my watch marked eleven and no signs of the train could be seen.

An odd sight we made, thus stretched out on the ground, with our heads and gun-barrels just showing over the edge of the bank—a picture appreciated by a dozen or more crows, who cawed indignantly at us from the foliage of neighboring trees.

Suddenly the whistle of the locomotive sounded in the distance, and we knew that the train would soon be along. Laughter and jests ceased as if by magic—death was in the air.

Now the roar of the wheels could be heard tearing along; another second, and around the curve swung the engine. In an instant the driver saw his peril, reversed the engine and whistled “down brakes;” too late, however, to avoid dashing halfway through the heap, where the engine stuck and the train came to a stop, with the armored car directly beneath us.

“*Diablo!* what’s the matter?” shouted a

voice from the rear door, followed by a head imprudently stuck through the opening. The questioner never found out, for a well-aimed bullet united him with the "Great Army Above," and his comrades dragged his body back into the car. That shot had been the signal, and the men poured their fire through the roof of the car, to the disgust and rage of the Spaniards, who now found the tables turned, being shot down without seeing or firing upon their assailants.

Never had I felt so queer under fire. Here we were pumping lead into a pack of howling, panic-stricken *gringos*, while we ran comparatively no danger. Never had that happened before; we determined to make the most of our opportunity.

One of our men, carried away by the ludicrous situation, jumped down on the car, and in a second lay prone upon his face, pierced by innumerable bullets. He paid dearly for his foolhardiness, for we afterward counted thirty-seven wounds on his body.

A few moments later the man by my side was wounded, and after placing him in a safe position I returned to my post.

Hardly had I done so when I noticed Vidal making for the top of the bank with the tin cylinder in his hand, leaving in his wake a thin streak of smoke, caused by the fuse which he had lighted.

“This is adding insult to injury,” I thought, as I watched him crawl down the embankment; but I consoled myself with the idea that they would have done the same to us, and I proceeded to watch the major.

On reaching the track he drew from his pocket a handkerchief, and holding it above his head, shouted:

“Hey! you men there, stop your firing! I wish to negotiate a small loan (his very words) which will not inconvenience you in the least.”

I repeated the same order to our men, who ceased firing, and were now watching their leader. A strange sight, to be sure, as he stood there, armed from head to foot, holding

in one hand the flag of truce, while in the other he carried the bomb, with its spluttering and sizzling fuse.

Out of the car door came a pale, horror-stricken face; with eyes that blinked incessantly as they peered through the smoke; a little red line down his chest showed where he had been hit; and I pitied him, as I watched him stand there, waiting for Vidal to speak.

“Now, look here,” said Leoncio, in his commanding manner; “you are all in a pretty bad stew in there (here the man worked his mouth around into a smile which was positively painful to behold), and I feel for you all. So, after consulting with my captain (pointing at me, which gesture I acknowledged by saluting the officer, who returned it in a very dignified manner), I have determined, provided you surrender, to free you all, upon the following conditions:

“First, that you pass out all your guns and equipments; second, that you exchange your

uniforms for ours, and third, that you take up the positions which we now hold."

"And if we refuse, señor, what will happen?" replied the lieutenant, for such he was.

"Why, my dear fellow, you will not be in a condition to regret it fifteen minutes later," answered Vidal, as he placed the bomb directly underneath the car.

"*Por Dios!* put that thing out," cried the Spaniard. "I will agree to your terms. It means dishonor and death to me, but I will do it for the sake of my men."

"It is a soldier's duty to die," replied Vidal sarcastically. "Hurry up about it," he continued, "for that match won't last all day."

And quick work they made of it, for in ten minutes we stood dressed in the Spanish uniforms and a pile of arms lay on the ground.

By this time some one had hauled the engineer and fireman from beneath the car and ordered them to start the train. Placing our prisoners on the embankment, we tipped our

hats, and with farewell words of consolation and advice to them, we started on our way to Camajuani, happy at the success of our venture.

But we shouted too soon, for hardly had we gone a mile when we saw coming toward the track a large body of infantry and cavalry, and we knew that the game was up.

For a moment Vidal thought of attempting to pass as friends, but the risk was too great, the enemy outnumbering us by ten to one, so accordingly the train was stopped and the order to retreat given.

The Spaniards saw us, and in another moment the bullets commenced to drop about us. It is hard enough work for a cavalryman to run, especially loaded down with the accoutrements of two men, as the majority of us were. I mourned the absence of my little horse, and as I jumped fences and cleared ditches I wondered if André had had sense enough to place him in a safe spot.

Fortunately, the enemy did not pursue us,

and after a mile or so we all brought up breathless in a sheltering wood.

We had lost two men and had three wounded: small pay for such a rich capture of arms and ammunition as we had made.

“Where is that can?” shouted Vidal, after he had recovered enough breath to be able to speak.

No one replied.

“Confound it all!” he continued, “that thing held my only pair of extra trousers; and here I am, dressed in this uniform, with the bright prospect of going through all the war in it.”

V.

A RACE FOR LIFE.

THE sun had just reached the zenith when, tired and hungry, we arrived at La Estrella, and after having marched for twenty-eight hours, never halting except to water our horses or bury our dead, the order to camp was given.

We were on our way to General Gomez, bearing dispatches, and had reached what was known as "the enemy's land."

The day before, our little force, one hundred and fifty strong, had been greatly crippled by an encounter with a superior force of the enemy, in which we suffered in killed and wounded a loss of twenty-eight men, and it was with many misgivings as to our safety that we came to a halt and encamped in this the most dangerous part of the province.

Many years ago a wealthy man built a plan-

tation on this spot and called it La Estrella (The Star). War and fire had since laid its walls low, and in the distance now stood the charred remnants of what was once a happy home. Bare fields, encircled by wire fences, still remained to mark the former cane plantation. Some three miles and a half away was a small wood, in the midst of which stood a *prefecto's* house, where a short while ago we had left our wounded.

Fifty yards beyond our sentries ran the Hanabana River, the boundary line of the Matanzas and Las Villas provinces.

Colonel E. Fonts, a man held in high esteem by General Gomez for his bravery and deportment, was in command, Captain J. Perez de Alderete and I acting as his aids. Three days before, we had received our dispatches from General Zayas, with orders to march day and night if necessary, but to deliver them before General Gomez crossed into the province of Havana.

Colonel Fonts is a young man, twenty-seven

years of age, and comes from one of the oldest and best families in the island. He had many times distinguished himself for bravery, and once, after a severe action, Gomez had taken his hand and presented him to the forces as "the man who honored the cause and flag for which he fought."

The guards had been posted, and as a precaution doubled, the rest of the force camping together in the middle of the field, where the tottering remains of a large hut yet stood and formed a welcome shade from the blistering rays of the sun.

Tired as we were, we forgot our danger, and ordering our horses to be tethered, we threw ourselves on the ground to rest and sleep.

There is nothing that disheartens a troop so much as defeat, and our losses of the day had caused that action to be numbered as such.

The men were gloomy and low-spirited—a most dangerous condition to be in for soldiers who are sure to meet the enemy. I could hear them, as I tried in vain to sleep, talking of

our last action in voices that still betrayed their terror, and I hoped that for that day, at least, we would **not** stumble across the Spanish forces.

The colonel and Alderete were soon asleep, and I was in a fair way to join them, when the clatter of a horse's hoofs on the hard ground caused me to sit up.

"What is it, José?" asked the colonel, awakened by the noise.

"A squad of about twenty men is coming down the road from La Estrella, sir," answered the orderly.

In a moment the men were on their feet, nervously fingering their rifles as they glanced from side to side, their blanched faces and dilated pupils betraying too well their fears.

"Did you recognize the force?" demanded Colonel Fonts.

"No, sir; they were too far away," replied José.

"Very well," answered the colonel; "tell Lieutenant Garrido to take five men and recon-

noiter the force," he added, turning to Captain Alderete, who saluted, mounted, and rode off to fulfill the order.

It was plain to me that Fonts was aware of the condition of his men, and as he gave the order to sound "Boots and Saddles" I wondered if he was going to risk an encounter.

"I have delivered your order, sir," said Captain Alderete, as he reined in his panting horse. "Lieutenant Garrido has left the camp; Sergeant Zarnova is in charge of the guard."

"Stand at ease," ordered the colonel, to the men, who had formed at attention.

As I glanced around I noticed the three guards rapidly mounting and forming. Not a moment was to be lost. Even the laziest man stepped lively as he remembered in whose territory we were.

I mounted my horse, and as we stood there large black clouds appeared, the wind freshened, and drops of rain began to fall. At that moment we heard the clear challenge of one of

the skirmishers—the challenge which was to be the death-knell for many of our men on that unlucky day.

“*Alto! Quien va?*”

“*España!*” came the reply, followed by the sharp report of a rifle, and a bullet whizzed through the air. Another and another. Fate had willed it, and we had met the enemy.

“Steady there—steady!” shouted the colonel to the men, who, without receiving the order, had commenced loading. “Tell Lieutenant Garrido,” he ordered, turning to me, “to retreat into camp, so that the enemy will follow him; send twenty men to reinforce Sergeant Zarnova and recall the other guards, Captain Alderete.”

After the first five or six shots the firing had ceased, and as I galloped across the field I wondered what had happened.

The guard was deployed in skirmishing line, Sergeant Zarnova standing at their right.

“They are only fifteen, sir,” he said, saluting. “Lieutenant Garrido is out there trying

to draw them on; but they don't seem in any great hurry."

I continued on my way, and after crossing the river saw Garrido. He and his men had halted a short distance up the road, about seventy-five yards from a small group of men, who seemed undecided what to do.

"It's a small guerrilla force," said the lieutenant, "and they are afraid to advance."

"Retreat," I ordered, "and they will follow you."

But there was no need of this order, for the enemy had massed and was now approaching, breaking into a gallop as they neared us. In an instant we turned, and at full speed made for the camp, while they followed us.

Suddenly our entire force appeared, coming down the road like a lot of raving maniacs, yelling, and brandishing their machetes, with Fonts well in the lead, eager to avenge the loss of the previous day.

Down the road they raced. Encircled in a cloud of dust, hats off, machetes gleaming in

the air, the reins flapping on the horses' necks yelling at the top of their voices, and each one striving to pass the other, while prudence was thrown to the winds.

"Be careful of an ambush, colonel!" shouted Alderete.

But the colonel's blood was up, and his mind was set on overtaking the now fleeing Spaniards. The rain was coming down in torrents, and the dust of a moment before was fast turning into a heavy mud. Faster and harder we galloped, now slipping, now sliding, half-blinded by the shower of mud, straining every muscle as we urged our horses in the vain hope of capturing our foes.

They were making for the ruins of La Estrella, and in less time than it takes to tell they disappeared behind the walls scarcely fifty yards ahead of us.

"An ambush!" exclaimed Alderete. Too late. A flash of over six hundred rifles blinded us, followed by the whizz of as many bullets and the awe-inspiring roar.

The enemy had been too smart for us. We were caught in the trap.

The surprise was complete. Confusion reigned. A moment before we could not ride fast enough, now all our strength was exerted in stopping our horses. The sudden halt caused the rear ranks to ride into their leaders. Horses and men went to the ground in horrible confusion.

The men would not listen to orders. Respect and discipline were forgotten. The enemy saw their chance, and volley after volley was poured into us.

Back again came the reinforced guerrillas. With cries of "*Viva España!*" "*Viva el Rey!*" they charged. This was the last straw, and with a yell of terror our forces turned and fled. I gave one last look at the enemy, dug my spurs into my horse and rode for my life.

No one who has not been so unfortunate as to take an active part in a panic can for a moment imagine the real meaning of the word.

It is the cessation of all reasoning power, the acceptance, as unavoidable, of an imminent danger which no one stops to examine, and from which there is no possible escape but in a rapid and brutal flight.

The instinct of self-preservation frequently transforms a coward into a famous hero; but the same instinct, under other circumstances and moral conditions often converts a handful of brave men into a herd of sheep who run, not knowing whither, to fall, perhaps, into a greater danger.

Such was our condition on that unfortunate day. I heard nothing but the triumphant cries of our pursuers, and had but one thought: to escape. I knew that a fall from my horse, or even a slight wound, meant death from the merciless sabers. Crazy with fright, I rode like a frantic man, never stopping to grasp the extended hand of a fallen comrade, or to heed his cry for help. Trees and bushes appeared before me; now they were fifty yards behind,

yet it seemed as though I did not move, as with relentless spur I urged on my steed.

A man went down in front of me, and as my horse for a second stumbled over him I cursed him. Now the river was reached. Every man wished to pass first. There was space for six abreast. Twenty sprang forward. Down they went, and over them rode their comrades. What matter if a hundred perish, provided you live. Death—death was behind me. I could feel its icy clutch upon my neck. Death in all its horror, of which I had never thought and often joked—death, that gaunt monster, was calling me, with extended arms, empty sockets and hollow, mocking laugh.

I could feel the dull thud as the saber cleaved my skull. I cursed myself, I cursed my luck. A branch struck me in the face; it would have stunned me before, now I hardly felt it.

A mile away were the woods. To reach them meant life and safety. Would I do it?

Around me rode the panic-stricken men,

now scarcely fifty. On each face was painted horror and fright. Each soul had but one thought—the woods. I turned in my saddle. Twenty yards behind rode the jeering and laughing Spaniards, now holding in their horses, now dashing almost up to us.

I remember distinctly the aspect that their leader presented. He rode a splendid black horse—rode as only men can who are born in the saddle. His large sombrero was perched on one side of his head, the black strap holding it hung just below his lower lip, and served to increase the fierce expression given to his cruel face by a large and long mustache. On his right wrist hung his saber, shining as it swung to and fro.

When I turned he was in the act of loading his Winchester, and as he shoved the cartridges home he smiled in a diabolical, fiendish manner. On both sides of him rode the troopers. One of them had jammed a shell and broken the extractor, and his vile oaths could

be distinctly heard calling down curses on the head of the maker of the weapon.

Back on the road over which we had traveled were seen the mutilated bodies of our former comrades. Hither and thither ran riderless horses, stopping anon to paw the ground and sniff with fright the foul air. Overhead hung a cloud of vultures, happy at the barbarous sight, soaring without a motion of their wings, and waiting for the moment when they might satisfy their hunger.

As I straightened in my saddle a bullet tore my hat from its cord; a second one barely missed my head, and I gave a gasp as I realized that I had been picked out as the next victim. There is nothing more appalling than to feel that you are thus singled out; that you can no longer hide yourself among your comrades. A moment later my horse stumbled, recovered, and then pitched headlong to the ground, sliding for a yard or more on his side.

With a cry of alarm and rage I struggled to

arise. I could not. My horse had fallen on me, pinning me helpless beneath his weight. All my efforts to reach my gun or machete were useless; they lay beneath me, and strive as I might I could not touch them.

Oh, the anguish of that moment! Never will I forget it! A soldier goes to war expecting to die, but to die like a man—not to be butchered like a pig.

As I lay there, expecting to hear the hiss of the saber cutting the air on its way to end my misery, millions of thoughts sprang through my brain, and the seconds seemed hours. Exhausted by the run and the loss of blood caused by its wounds, my horse refused to obey me, but lay still and panting. In vain did I coax, in vain did I urge; all I received in answer was an indifferent motion of his ears as they beat time to the throbbing of his breaking heart.

So this was the end of all my hopes and dreams. A horse dashed up to within a foot

of me. I closed my eyes, muttered a prayer, and awaited the end.

“For God’s sake look sharp! Try to get up! I have six shots in my Mauser! Pull on the reins!” cried a voice that I recognized as brave old Sisto’s.

With the strength of a condemned man who sees one more chance of escape I grasped the reins and jerked my horse’s head completely off the ground.

Perhaps it was the pain, may be it was fate, but my horse responded, and with an effort rose to his feet. In a second I was up and in the saddle, calling on my little thoroughbred for a last attempt for life and liberty.

We rode as never man rode before. Around us hummed and whistled the bullets—the very air seemed alive with them.

My horse appeared to realize the situation, and stretched his wiry body and plied his swift legs in a mighty and last attempt.

Never had he responded so to my words before. With extended neck, and ears that lay

back over his little yellow head, he made with terrific speed for the sheltering woods into which our band was already vanishing.

Now over a ditch, now over a fence, nearer and nearer we came, until at last, with a final stride, we entered the sheltering trees. A second later we were lost to view and saved.

Why tell of the heartrending spectacle therein? Of that sad sight of eighteen men, all that remained of our force, scarcely one without a wound, all heartbroken. With a sob of mingled grief and joy, I threw my arms around my horse's neck and buried my face in his shaggy mane.

Faithful little fellow! Never had I a truer friend.

VI.

THROUGH THE JAWS OF DEATH.

“Is there a man here willing to risk his life in this attempt?” demanded General Capote.

For a moment no one answered, each man looking at his neighbor. Many present had imperiled their lives over and over again; but this venture seemed too hazardous even to the most dare-devil spirit. The odds were ten to one against success.

“No one?” asked the general again, this time with a ring of disappointment in his voice.

“Pardon me, sir, but I will do it.”

The speaker was Lieutenant Falcon, a mere boy of twenty-two, the favorite of his regiment.

A murmur of surprise and applause ran through the assembled council as Falcon arose and made his statement.

“I congratulate you, sir; the brigade should be proud of you,” replied the general, a smile lighting up his rugged face as he affectionately placed his hand on his young subordinate’s shoulder.

“Gentlemen,” he continued, “you are dismissed. Lieutenant Falcon, kindly remain a moment longer.

Somewhat shamefaced, the officers saluted and retired.

The capture of a fort had for some time been thought of, and the general had on that night called his officers together and submitted to them his plan of attack. To obtain possession of the enemy’s post by force was impossible. By strategy alone could it be effected.

The fort in question was garrisoned by one hundred and twenty-five men, including three officers, and was well provided with ammunition. It was, in fact, a halting-place for all Spanish columns in need of the necessary implements of war.

Situated in a large clearing, surrounded by

a ditch six feet by four, again encircled by a fence formed of six wires, it was, as the reader may well imagine, most difficult to approach.

For many days Capote had been scheming, and after hearing his plan the officers were unanimous in their approval.

Just below one of the sentry-boxes an opening had been made, barely large enough to admit the passage of a man. Its use formerly had been as an exit for garbage, but it now lay almost hidden beneath the grass which time and idleness had allowed to grow.

To enter the fort through the aperture, overpower the surprised guard and open the door to our men—this was the venture which the young lieutenant had undertaken. It was a task to tax the nerve and resource of the boldest.

Lieutenant Alfred Falcon had but a few months previously joined the brigade; but being in the fullest sense of the phrase “a jolly good fellow,” he had quickly made friends with everyone. His light-heartedness and happy-go-lucky ways were captivating.

"Now, my boy," continued the general, after all had left, "you are doubtlessly aware of the imminent peril of the mission which you are about to undertake, and while admiring your courage, I cannot refrain from attempting to lay before you all the risk you will incur. You are far too young to throw away your life so recklessly."

"I thank you, sir, for your kind advice," replied Falcon; "but I have thought over all the dangers, and I am determined to go."

"Very well, so be it," answered General Capote. "When will you be ready to start?"

"To-morrow evening would suit me," said Falcon; "the moon will not be up before two o'clock, and by that hour all will be over."

"As you wish. I will break camp at seven o'clock to-morrow night. That is all," said Capote.

Lieutenant Falcon turned, and walked toward a group of brother-officers who were impatiently waiting to congratulate him.

A circle was formed around the huge camp-

fire, on which a large pot of coffee was soon boiling. Pipes and cigarettes were lighted, and Falcon was requested to stand up and enlighten the assembly as to his plans and his hopes of success.

“Boys,” he cried, while striving to balance himself on the trunk of a fallen tree—“boys, we are all here to fight for the same cause, and I know that if I should fail to-morrow every one of you would be eager to make the same attempt. I’ll let you into that fort to-morrow night, boys, or——”

But here he lost his balance, and his generous speech was cut short.

Many were the deeds of valor told and listened to that night, and the meeting was promising to be a long one when it was interrupted by the notes of the bugle sounding “taps,” followed a second later by the shrill whistle of “silence.”

“Good-nights” were whispered, and each man betook him to his quarters, and then the measured step of the sentry alone broke the

silence. Now and then a form would disentangle itself from its numerous coverings and arise to throw a log on the fire, which would leap and flare, casting its bright light over the blanketed bodies of the sleeping men.

The day dawned beautiful and cool. The woods were alive with the merry twitter of birds as the men bustled about preparing their breakfast.

Horses were bathed, and tethered in spots where the grass was fresh. Hammocks were unslung and rolled up. Pots and kettles were hung over the fires. Vegetables were being washed and peeled, while over everything prevailed such an atmosphere of joy and peace that were it not for the glitter of steel from the stacked arms one would have imagined himself on some merry hunting expedition.

Here and there were officers writing letters, while others, less held by the ties of home and friendship, stood idly smoking as they watched the grooming of their favorite horses.

“How is Mambi’s leg this morning, Juan?”

asked Falcon, gently running his hand over a cruel-looking scar.

“As fit as can be, sir,” answered the orderly. “You will be able to ride him to-night,” he added, casting an admiring glance at his young officer.

“Come here; take this, old boy,” called Falcon, as he held out to his horse a tempting fresh carrot. The little fellow lifted his soft nose from the grass, and catching sight of the generous offering, lazily accepted it.

Slowly the day wore on, till at last the sun sank beneath the horizon.

Preparatory call had just been sounded, and the camp was hastily preparing for its nocturnal expedition.

The forms of the men stood out like silhouettes in the fading twilight, and their grotesque shadows danced to and fro across the open field.

“Tararaaa—tararaa—ta-ta-ta—ti-ta!” rang out, and was followed by the orders, “Fall in, men! Lively, there!”

The trampling of four hundred horses, the rattling of stirrups and arms, for a moment vibrated through the air; then all was silent, each man at attention in his place.

One after another came the orders, and the troop broke into columns of two and marched by the guard.

Falcon rode at the side of his men as calm and collected as if on pleasure bent, his slim figure making a strange contrast to those of his hardened veterans.

Not a word was spoken, and the troop journeyed in an ominous silence.

At the head of his men rode General Capote, his large Panama hat pushed back from his forehead, looking an out-and-out fighter.

A march of an hour, then a halt. The men dismounted, tied their horses and continued their journey on foot.

The hands of the watch pointed to twenty minutes past nine when the spot designated for the final halt was reached.

Through the haze could be dimly traced the

faint outlines of the fort where it stood on the summit of a small hill, the north side of which gradually sloped until it reached a level. The trees for fifty yards about it had been felled, and now lay hidden beneath the tall grass.

Orders were issued in a low tone, and the men rapidly deployed, surrounding the opening, screening themselves from view behind the bushes and trees.

The mist of a short while before had thickly settled down into a heavy fog, most favorable to their designs.

The fort could no longer be discerned, and the monotonous tramp of the sentry pacing his beat, varied anon by the rattle of his arms as he shifted position, was the only sound which reached their ears.

Ten o'clock. A scurry of feet, and a shaft of light darted forth into the fog as a door opened and the relief squad turned out. Then once more all was still.

Behind a broad *ceiba* was Falcon. He had taken off his spurs and all his arms, retaining

only his hunting-knife and revolver. At his side was General Capote, talking to him in a low whisper.

The boy's face was pale as death, but in his eyes shone the light of a brave and fearless nature.

"Remember," cautioned the general—"avoid all unnecessary danger. Chance may favor you and allow you to pass the sentry unseen. Do so, if possible. The doors are on your right as you enter. There is but one bolt. Withdraw that and fling them open. From the moment that you leave here I will pass the word, so that everyone may be ready to act. I think you may safely start now. Are you ready?"

"Yes, sir," replied the brave lad.

"Go, then, my boy, and may God watch over you," answered the general, grasping his hand.

In another moment Falcon had stepped from behind the tree and was parting the bushes that separated him from the clearing

Then down on his hands and knees he went, and softly pushing aside the tall grass, started on his journey of duty and peril.

Slowly and gently he crept along, stopping every few yards with bated breath and throbbing heart to listen. Stones and thorns pierced and lacerated his hands, but he heeded them not.

Now he had reached the fence, and could plainly see the form of the sentry.

For a moment he hesitated; then, as the soldier disappeared behind the box, he quickly slid beneath the bottom wire. A few yards further and he touched the edge of the ditch. The most difficult and dangerous part of his journey had been reached.

How was he to cross that broad strip of space without attracting the guard's attention? To jump was impossible, and not to be thought of. There was only one way to accomplish it. He must drop into the ditch and crawl up the opposite embankment.

With a hand that trembled from excitement he felt along the edge until, finding a protrud-

ing root, he grasped it firmly with both hands, lowered himself over the edge, and as his feet broke the surface of the green stagnant water and touched the muddy bottom he heaved a sigh of relief. Quickly he turned to seek the opposite side, when an unfortunate movement of his hand loosened a pebble, which dropped with a splash into the water.

Instantly the sentry stopped, and as Falcon looked up he saw the man peering directly over the ramparts into his face. Falcon stood like one paralyzed; he dared not breathe, and his heart throbbed painfully as for a moment his blood seemed turned to ice.

It seemed ages before the sentry faced about and resumed his walk; and even then Falcon feared to stir, lest his next movement should betray him. However, after a few moments his confidence returned, and exerting all his strength, he drew himself up the incline. Once there, he groped around until he found the entrance, and, crouching down, paused to gain strength for the final effort.

His clothing was in shreds, and his bleeding hands, into which the mud was ground, stung fiercely.

It was growing late, and no time was to be lost. Casting a last look at the spot where he had left his comrades, he grasped his knife, and, throwing himself flat upon his stomach, slipped into the opening.

Slim as he was, he could barely squeeze his way through. Inch by inch he slowly advanced, now dragging, now pushing, with a steady snake-like motion. Dust and moss fell from above, filling his lungs and nearly choking him. It seemed as if the end would never be reached. Every few seconds he could see the soldier's feet as they passed the opening of the passage. Falcon knew that he must time himself so as to leave the tunnel directly after the Spaniard passed the exit, and then surprise and overpower him when his back was turned. Once more the man's feet came into view and disappeared.

"I'll do it the next time," muttered Falcon.

Back again came the sentry. Shuffle—shuffle, closer and closer, came the steps, until, when almost opposite Falcon's face, they stopped. The next instant the butt of the gun struck the ground: the sentinel had halted—tired, perhaps. A fatal coincidence, and one which, if prolonged, would result disastrously. Falcon decided to act.

Edging a few inches nearer, he firmly grasped the knife. Without a thought to his own safety, he sprang out, almost from under the feet of the surprised guard.

For a second both men faced each other; then with a tiger-like jump Falcon sprang at his foe's throat, but not before his startled adversary had raised his gun and driven the bayonet through Falcon's leg, where, becoming unlocked from the barrel, it remained.

With a half-stifled cry of pain, the brave officer fell to the ground, dragging his antagonist with him. Over and over they rolled, the grasp on the Spaniard's throat preventing him from making any outcry.

Tightening his hold, Falcon brought his fist down with crushing force upon the face of his opponent. Again and again it descended, until the man's head sank back upon the ground. Fully convinced that he was not shamming, Falcon loosened his hold and painfully arose.

Almost fainting from the struggle and loss of blood, he started for the door.

It was only necessary to walk a few yards, yet the distance seemed immeasurable as slowly he dragged his crippled limb after him, until at last, with a final effort, he reached the entrance, withdrew the bolt, and threw the door wide open. For a second nothing stirred. Then in poured a shrieking, shouting human avalanche.

Throughout the fort resounded the victorious yells of the Cubans. The sharp crack of the revolver, the crash of steel and the cries of the surprised and dying Spaniards made the place a pandemonium.

Some were shot as they lay in their cots;

others, more fortunate, had time to defend themselves.

For over an hour the struggle continued. Then, little by little, the uproar subsided—and presently to the peak of the flagpole fluttered up the solitary star of Cuba.

Around a bench in the guardroom were grouped a crowd of officers, looking with anxious eyes upon the still form of Lieutenant Falcon. They were waiting impatiently for the verdict of the doctor, as with tender hands he withdrew the bayonet and bandaged the wounded limb.

“Gentlemen,” said the physician, putting the finishing touches to his work—“gentlemen, Lieutenant Falcon will in a few weeks be able to resume his place among you.”

“Captain Falcon, you should say,” replied the old general, as he bent over the silent form and pinned three silver stars on the blood-stained shirt.

VII.

FIGHTING WITH DYNAMITE.

It promised to be a novel experience, and I felt a thrill of excitement run through me when my name was mentioned together with that of Captain Domingo del Monte as chief actors in the venture.

We were going to mine the highway, and, if possible, blow half a column of Spaniards into eternity.

Captain Del Monte received his orders in his methodical, cool English manner (he had been brought up in England), not betraying his emotions even by the quiver of an eyelash. I, on the contrary, could feel the color come and go in my face; and as I extended my hand for the six little deadly black packages it trembled so that for a moment it looked rather

dubious as to just when the explosion would take place.

“Captain Del Monte will superintend the construction of the pits, while you will be in charge of the men and dynamite,” said Colonel Alvarez, as he dismissed us. “And,” he continued, “try to make a success out of this.”

Handling my perilous parcel with the greatest respect and care, I turned and walked with Del Monte back to our quarters.

Almost any one who has not had any dealings with dynamite is liable to feel a trifle nervous when thrust so unexpectedly into contact with it. I confess that, while feeling highly honored by my commission, I would fain have handed over to any one else the glory of carrying the explosive. My fears, I observed with pleasure, were not unshared; for my orderly, upon my arrival, and after noticing my unwelcome burden, withdrew to a very respectful distance, whence every now and then he cast upon me a sorrowful and apprehensive glance.

Placing my parcel in a secure spot (where everyone could see it and avoid intruding upon its uncertain temper), I invited Captain Del Monte to breakfast with me and discuss our plan of action.

“When will you be ready to march?” I asked, starting to light a cigarette, but quickly changing my intentions.

“Well, you see, that depends,” drawled Del Monte, in his Piccadilly accent. “We must wait for Manuel, who left early this morning for the deposit, where the batteries and other utensils are stored. The troops will not be along before to-morrow afternoon, so if we leave here to-night and encamp near the road we will have plenty of time in which to work. How many men will you take?”

“How many shall you require?” I asked.

“Fifteen men can do the work in two hours,” answered he. “If you intend to fight, however, you should take a larger force.

“My orders are to protect you from a surprise while you work,” said I, “and after the

mines are exploded I am to fire a few volleys and retire in good order. Colonel Alvarez's idea is for me not to fight, but to so cripple and frighten the Spaniards with the dynamite that they will abandon all further intention of attacking us and retreat into the village."

"Oh, if that is the case, thirty men should be sufficient," replied Del Monte, yawning to the full extent of his powerful lungs. "My goodness!" he continued, "do you intend to starve me? Here it is half-past eleven and your man doesn't seem to be making much headway with his cooking."

"Here, Raphael," I called, "what's the matter with breakfast? Everybody else has finished, and we have not even begun."

"The chicken is a little tough, sir," he answered apologetically, "and——"

"Chicken!" I exclaimed, in surprise. "Why, where did it come from?"

"Why, it was kind of wandering around, sir, and I thought it would come in handy," said the black rascal, with a capacious grin.

"How are you cooking it?" inquired Del Monte, with awakened interest.

"Frying it in tallow, sir," replied Raphael, with all the seriousness of an imported *chef*.

"Well, see that you bring it in hot," said I, as he returned to his fire.

"Where did you get that cook?" asked Del Monte, when the man had left.

"He turned up after the encounter at San Felipe," I replied. "He was very much rattled and unstrung, and convinced that cooking was more in his line than fighting, so I let him be my cook."

"Well, he knows how to obtain a breakfast," answered Del Monte. "I hope his cooking is equal to his foraging."

"Here is the heralded morsel now, and you can see for yourself," said I cheerfully, as Raphael appeared upon the scene with a much-battered kettle, in the bottom of which, floating in a sea of seething tallow, was the diminutive chicken.

We had long since forgotten the authentic

appearance of a properly cooked fowl, so, taking our *chef* at his word, we began eating rapidly, lest the tallow should grow cold. as A vegetable we had roasted bananas. Our frugal meal at an end, we lay down under a shady tree to enjoy a cigar which would have passed muster as A No. 1 in any part of the world.

“Thank goodness there were only two of us to that chicken,” muttered Del Monte, wiping the tallow from his lips.

The heat soon became oppressive. The camp grew very still. The men lay silently under the bamboos. There was no sound but the low cooing of doves in the branches overhead.

Soon my eyelids grew heavy, and, lulled by the rustle of the leaves as an occasional puff of wind gently swayed their branches, I fell asleep.

From a dream of Spanish tortures, a hideous nightmare, I was awakened by a blessedly familiar voice in my ear, saying, “Manuel has just returned, sir.”

I opened my eyes to find my orderly and Manuel at my side, the latter with a large bundle on his shoulder.

“Eh—returned? Who? Which? Oh, yes! Did you bring all the stuff, Manuel?” I asked, after much bewildered yawning.

“Yes, sir. All that I could find. I have two batteries here, fifteen hundred feet of wire, a couple of shovels and pickaxes, together with a box of sawdust, which will serve to carry the dynamite in,” answered he. “Here are the batteries,” he continued; “the rest of the outfit is on the mule.”

“Very well. We must start at once, if Captain Del Monte is ready. Go tell the captain it is two o’clock, Raphael.”

In a few minutes the orderly returned, followed closely by Del Monte, who agreed with me that it would be well to start at once.

An hour later we had set out on our march. The force consisted of thirty-five men and a pack-mule, which carried the batteries, tools and the box containing the explosive. It was

most ludicrous to notice how every one avoided that mule, and once when he became stuck in a bog and began to rear and plunge in his efforts to free himself a panic was narrowly avoided.

All the men scattered, deploying, by force of habit, at about seventy-five yards' distance, where they impatiently awaited the outcome of events. The animal, however, managed to extricate himself, and resuming his customary woebegone expression, again plodded calmly along.

The first stars were sparkling faintly in the darkening sky when we reached our destination and halted.

The outposts were stationed, horses unsaddled, hammocks slung, blankets unrolled, and a large fire kindled, making us in a very short while tolerably at home.

Suddenly there arose high in the air a human voice. Louder and stronger it swelled, now rising, now falling, as with the old vigor of happier days Del Monte sang "The Marseil-

laise." The sound, caught up by the woods, re-echoed far away, and at the grand chorus in which France calls her children to arms my depression and care were forgotten. My blood once more leaped through my veins as I proudly felt that I was fighting for that sacred cause: Liberty.

At dawn the camp was busy in its preparations for the coming adventure. A spot was chosen about two hundred yards distant from the road as a safe place from which to operate the batteries; and the wire, extended in as straight a line as possible, was covered with dirt and twigs, so that its glimmer would not betray us. Upon reaching the wall which ran parallel with the highway it was passed beneath the lower layer of stones.

The pits were dug eight feet by four and three in depth. At the bottom of the holes were placed the three cartridges, two feet apart the set joined by a wire which in turn was connected to the main one. Rocks and logs were placed on top, which were again covered

with earth. The surface was leveled and trampled upon so as to remove all traces of freshly shoveled dirt.

In an incredibly short time all was finished, and the men, nothing loath to separate themselves from so dangerous an article, scampered back into the woods.

The batteries were ordinary storage ones, with a connector to join on to the wire, and a small telegraphic button which, when pressed, would explode the mines.

Del Monte had charge of one of these and his aid of the other. I was to give the signal when the enemy had passed over the further pit, so as to make sure that both mines would be covered before the buttons were pressed.

It was well near half-past one when the distant notes of the Spanish bugle reached us, and the vanguard of their strong column was dimly made out as it rounded a far-off curve in the road. At first but mere moving specks, they rapidly grew in size, as with a firm, uniform tread, shoulder to shoulder, they swung along.

A feeling of horror and pity crept over me as I watched them marching on so unconcerned and unsuspecting. Laughing and talking, they came down the road, and their faces were distinctly visible as they passed our ambush.

I glanced around at the men, who, prone upon their faces, with their guns resting on logs or stones, awaited but the word to fire. A short distance apart from me were Del Monte and his assistant, each with a finger held poised above the button, ready for my fatal signal.

The advance rank of the main body had passed the first pit—yet I must wait until they had cleared the second in order to insure the success of both mines.

Fascinated, I watched the movements of a soldier who, with his gun slung across his back, was tossing a couple of oranges as he trudged along. A sense of pity seized me, and I determined to wait until he passed before giving the order. At last he was by. The moment for action had arrived. With eyes

bulging out of my head and hands tightly clutched, I leaned forward and gave the order.

Simultaneously with the word a deafening report rent the air, followed instantly by another. Dark shapes shot up and fell almost at our feet; cries of agony, despair and terror mingled with the sharp crack of the carbines. A sickening odor of burned flesh filled our nostrils, and over all there hung a dense, heavy black cloud of smoke, which slowly rose, disclosing a horrible and cruel sight.

The Spaniards, as if by common accord, turned and fled, not heeding the orders of their officers, who vainly tried to rally them. Horror-stricken, they ran, never stopping in their mad career until they reached the village.

Hastily gathering up our paraphernalia, we mounted our horses and galloped over to the scene of carnage.

The road had been torn up into a cave, whence the smoke yet curled; bent guns, severed heads and disemboweled horses lay mingled in sickening heaps. Here lay a body whose

hideously contorted features marked the acute agony he had suffered until relieved by death. At his side and almost touching him was the body of a mere boy, whose wide-open eyes still held the expression of surprise and horror; while far above yet hung the black cloud, making, as it gracefully rolled and floated, a fitting mantle to so cruel a scene. With a heavy heart, I gave the order to close up and continue the march.

VIII.

THE SACK OF SANTA CLARA.

“WOULD it ever stop raining?” That was the question we all asked each other as we stood beneath the trees, drenched from head to foot, hungry and cold.

It was four o'clock P.M. and the water had been coming down in torrents ever since ten o'clock in the morning, at which hour a halt had been ordered and camp formed; and now, twelve hundred strong, we sat beneath the tall mango trees waiting impatiently for the sun to shine and warm our shivering bodies.

Beneath a bending and groaning tree, a short distance from us, were General M. Gomez, Brigadier-General Zayas and Major Leoncio Vidal, the rain running off the bent brims of their sombreros and pouring in little streams from the sleeves of their coats.

Sitting on a log by my side was Captain

Tejedor, attempting, with his customary good humor, to keep lighted my old pipe.

Night was fast approaching, yet during all that long day, and after a march of fifteen leagues, not a morsel of food had passed our lips. That morning we had reached Manajabo, happy at the prospect of a day's rest. A few minutes later the storm had set in, shattering all our hopes.

"Here, take your pipe," said Tejedor, handing me the old veteran. "I've used every match I had trying to keep it lighted. Haven't you anything to eat? I'm nearly starved."

"Get up, you lazy rascal, and see if there's not a piece of cold meat in one of the saddlebags," I shouted to Raphael, my orderly, who arose with a look of reproach and terror in his eyes.

"There is half an ear of roasted corn in mine, Raphael," said Tejedor, bending his head to let fall the little pool of water which every few minutes formed on the crown of his Panama hat. "You can take——"

“Hello! what’s the row now?” I exclaimed, as El Curro stood out from beside General Gomez and placed his bugle to his lips.

The next instant I had my answer, “preparatory call,” sounding clearly and loudly above the uproar.

“Hurry up there, raphael! Drop those bags and saddle Senator Sherman! Quick, now!” I exclaimed.

Without a murmur the faithful darky sprang up and darted into the tall, wet grass, now full of rapidly moving men, all bent on the same errand. A minute later he appeared, leading my horse, who, with his drooping ears and little yellow body dripping wet, was the picture of mute but earnest protest.

“Where under the sun is the Old Man sending us to?” groaned Tejedor, as he superintended the equipping of his mount.

“It must be on some important mission Vidal is going,” I answered, noticing that our favorite officer was buckling on his belt.

“Captain Tejedor, you’re wanted by the gen-

eral" exclaimed an aid splashing up through the mud.

"Hurry back and let me know the news," I shouted after him as he hastened to the general.

"Good news. And you're going along. Are you ready?" he exclaimed a minute later all in one breath.

"I've been ready for the last five minutes; but where are we bound that it causes you such joy?" I replied.

"We're going to enter Santa Clara and attack the arsenal. General Gomez is sending six hundred men under Major Vidal. We leave at once. General Luque is in charge of the town, and has fifteen hundred men with him; it will be great sport," he answered. "My orderly is sick, so you'll have to take his place," he added, turning to Raphael, whose face underwent a rapid change from indifference to abject fright.

Here was news sure enough. Santa Clara is the capital of Las Villas, and the war station

and stronghold of the Spaniards in that district. In a moment my hunger and fatigue vanished, and I impatiently awaited the second call.

Six hundred strong we fell in, two lines of hungry, dirty, dripping men.

"Soldiers of Cuba," said General Zayas, after he had inspected the force, "the general calls on you to-night for another proof of your valor and patriotism. You are going to attack Santa Clara, and General Gomez relies on you all."

A wild hurrah was his answer, and the troop rode off in columns of two.

The rain had now ceased, and the last rays of the sinking sun shone brightly through the damp atmosphere.

Major Vidal, Tejedor and I rode side by side, talking about the coming attack, which was to be the most audacious piece of work ever attempted by the Cuban army.

A north wind had sprung up, clearing the sky and promising a cold night.

"Take this jacket, captain," said Vidal to

me; "you're teeth are chattering like castanets and you are wet to the skin. I've no need for it, as my blanket is dry."

I thanked him and donned the jacket, which I preserve to this day, a sad memory of one of the bravest officers who ever drew a sword in the defence of the Cuban cause. A few yards further on we halted.

"Ride over to that hut, captain," said Vidal, turning to me, "and bring Mateo here; I need him as a guide."

Putting spurs to my horse, I soon reached the dilapidated shanty, and knocking on the door, called for Mateo, who, although it was but seven o'clock, had retired for the night.

"Easy, now. You'll knock down the house with your hammering," exclaimed a gruff voice from within, in answer to my raps. "Oh, I beg your pardon," he said, as his face appeared through a rough cut in the wall which went by the name of window, "I thought it was old Juan. What can I do for you?" he continued, stepping out into the open.

"Serve as a guide for the force; we are going to Santa Clara," I answered.

"As guide? My horse is gone, sir, and beside, I don't know the road."

"Come on foot, then," I answered, somewhat sharply, for the man had a bad reputation. "And brush up your memory, for Major Vidal knows you too well," I continued, as he followed me with a dogged air.

"Here's the man, sir," said I, addressing the major, "but he says he doesn't know the road."

"Doesn't know the road," repeated Vidal, "and has lived here all his life? Come—come. I'll have none of that. You show us the way or you'll regret it; but be careful of any treachery, as you will be the first to pay the penalty. Go on," and he motioned to the man to lead the way.

With a muttered curse Mateo started down the road, walking between Tejedor and myself.

"I want to reach the east entrance by eight o'clock," said Vidal.

"I'll do my best," answered the man, in a sullen tone.

His "best" proved to be what was required, and a few minutes before the hour we came in view of the guarded entrance.

"The horses will be left here," ordered Vidal.

I passed the word for Raphael, who shortly appeared, much alarmed by his proximity to the Spaniards.

"Don't you dare move from this place," I said, shaking his arm by way of impressing upon his mind my orders. "Take good care of the horses, now."

"And see that nothing is lost," added Tejedor. "It cost me a blanket the last time we entered a town, and I'll have none of that this time."

"Do you hear?" I exclaimed, desperate at the look of fright on his face.

"Ye—es, sir," came the trembling answer.

"If he wasn't the best cook in the squadron I'd send him about his business," I said,

mournfully, taking an extra hitch in my belt.

“It’s fifteen minutes past eight, and nine o’clock is the time set for the attack. The soldiers must be all retiring for the night by this time,” said Vidal, coming up, “so the nearer we are when the hour strikes the better. Lead the way, Mateo.”

It was black as pitch, and each man held on to the one ahead of him, as softly and without the slightest sound we followed the guide.

After five minutes’ walk we suddenly halted, and the click of a wire fence being cut broke the silence. Then forward again.

“Pass the order for the men to lie flat on the ground,” whispered Vidal, showing the example.

Ugh! but it was disagreeable, crawling like snakes through the mud and water, encumbered by a rifle and machete. So close were we to one another that several times Vidal’s boots touched my face as he dragged himself along. It seemed ages to me before the out-

lines of the fort appeared and we heard the measured tread of the guard.

Slowly and painfully we went, until just abreast of the fort we stopped. Tejedor was a little ahead of me, and as I edged up I noticed that he was close to the guide.

"Get on the other side of him," he whispered. "Vidal has gone ahead. We must wait."

With another effort I reached the man's side, whose face could barely be discerned, so dark was the night.

Crouching on the ground, we could plainly hear the voices of the soldiers inside the fort mingling with the soft notes of a guitar. Overhead, the sentry stamped his feet to keep them warm and hummed a tune.

Now and then the sharp, long call of a locust would be taken up by its fellows, until the plains seemed alive with them, the sound dying out in a long, faint whistle.

Soon the clock in the church solemnly rang out the hour of nine. Simultaneously there

came from the arsenal a sharp, rapid bugle-call, which was taken up from several parts of the town.

"You wretch! you've betrayed us," whispered Tejedor, as he grasped the guide by the throat.

"No—no; it's the 'silence call,' " answered the man, half choked.

Almost before he had finished, and with such suddenness that my heart seemed to leap into my throat, the sentry called out:

"Nine o'clock; all's well! S-i-l-e-n-c-e!" The call was repeated all around the fortifications, seeming as if it would never cease.

"All's well, eh? Just wait a minute and see if it is," muttered Tejedor.

The ground, which a short while before had felt so soft, was fast becoming to my aching body unbearably hard as I vainly tried to find a comfortable position. And, to add to my discomfort, it was getting bitterly cold.

A few moments later Tejedor pulled my sleeve and started ahead, but this time with

bad luck, for hardly had we gone ten feet when——

“Alto! Quien va?” rang out.

“Cuba Libre!” answered Tejedor. “Forward, men—forward!” he cried.

The sharp, whip-like snap of the Mauser rang out, followed by another and another, and in less time than it takes to tell the town was in an awful uproar, the shouts of men and the crack of musketry coming from every quarter.

Never hesitating, we rushed blindly forward. I tripped on a root and fell flat on my face. In a second I was up and on again. We could see, by the flash of guns, dark figures darting about as the surprised Spaniards hastily formed in the streets. Volley after volley came from the houses; stones, sticks—everything—seemed to drop from above.

As we turned a corner into the main street there leaped from across the way a tongue of fire, followed by the rattle of a Gatling gun as it belched forth its missiles. Never had I

heard the air so alive with bullets. They seemed everywhere, dropping from the walls at our back, ripping and ricochetting along the ground, hissing and moaning as they tore by. From the windows above, the flash of rifles revealed the crouching figures of the Spaniards loading and firing. Bugle calls and orders now and then sounded faintly amid the thundering uproar. The night was thick with sulphurous smoke and dust from the flying bits of mortar, while overhead the funereal notes of the church bell rang out their warning.

Another volley came from the barricade, causing us, as it swept down the street, to flatten ourselves against the walls of the houses.

No wonder we hesitated to advance into that storm of lead and death; the strongest heart quailed at the idea. Retreat seemed our only hope, when down the street came a hatless, shouting figure. Once more the gun vomited forth its cruel welcome, but from the midst of the smoke arose the cry of "Forward, boys! Down with them! To the arsenal! For-

ward!" and poor Vidal darted past us as he led the way to victory and glory.

Like one man we followed, and before the Spaniards fired again we had leaped their barricade, blindly and desperately hewing and cutting our way through their ranks.

Never stopping, we ran down the street, anxious to reach the square before the enemy had turned and trained their guns. Once more it roared, and with a cry of rage and despair brave Vidal fell headlong upon the cathedral steps.

The blaze of many burning houses now illuminated the square, from which the defeated Spaniards were rapidly retreating. General Luque stood on the balcony of the theatre, giving orders to the aides by his side. Despairingly he waved his arms.

Grasping his Winchester, Tejedor leveled it and fired at the Spanish chief. The bugler at his side fell, and slipping through the rails, pitched into the street. That was enough, and General Luque turned and vanished into the house.

Little by little the firing ceased, and, unmolested, the men turned to pillage the well-filled warehouses. Cigar stores, clothing establishments, groceries—every available place—was broken into and ransacked, and ere long the flames of over threescore houses lighted the scene of destruction.

For hours the work continued; then as the first rays of the rising sun pierced the smoke-shrouded atmosphere, the call of “assembly” sounded, giving the signal for retreat.

Loaded with every kind of portable and useful article, the men obeyed, never heeding or returning the scattered farewell shots of the hidden enemy.

“What did you take?” asked Tejedor, as we reached our horses.

“Three boxes of cigars and sixty packages of cigarettes. And you?”

“A jar of preserves, a pair of shoes and a box of soap,” answered he, winding his handkerchief around his wounded wrist. He had chanced to get in the way of a Mauser bullet.

IX.

A DINNER THAT COST US DEAR.

"THIS is more than I can stand, Ernest," said Captain Cueto to Colonel E. Fonts. "Here we are within three miles of old Demetrio's place and hungry as wolves, yet you refuse to accept the invitation to his dinner. And you know what kind of a dinner he always gives us."

"Oh, don't be cranky, even if you are the commanding officer," said I, in turn. "Come along. The men will be safe with the sergeant, and we will be back by ten."

"Now, look here, you fellows," answered Ernest. "Don't you suppose I'm as anxious for a square meal as you all are? Demetrio said, when he invited us this morning, that a troop of Spanish cavalry had been hovering

around his place at daybreak, and I don't care to lose my head for a dinner."

"All the more reason that they should not be there this afternoon," I interrupted. "Ah, come along, Ernest," I continued, laying my hand upon his arm. "Our horses are in good trim, and if the worst comes we can make a run for it."

Slowly we rode down the road, the two orderlies a short distance ahead acting as scouts, and we finally came in sight of old Demetrio's house, a plain, two-story affair, surrounded by a high hedge. In the good old days of prosperity our host had been numbered among the cattle kings of that district, but war and its ravages had greatly impoverished him. He was a man of about forty-three years of age, tall and well knit.

"Well, boys," he explained, as we dismounted. "I'm glad to see you. The place is kind of lonely since the family left for the city, Pancho and I being all alone, but I guess we will manage to enjoy a good meal just the

same. Better tie your horses to the hedge," he added.

"Why? Heard any bad news?" queried Cueto, tilting his chair against the wall.

"No, nothing out of the ordinary, except that Captain Garrido and his guerrillas were around here this morning, but he's far away by this time."

"I think," said Fonts, "the orderlies had better mount guard out on the road. How about that, Demetrio?"

"Not a bad idea; it's always good to be prepared. Just make yourselves comfortable and I'll go out and station them," answered Demetrio, as he left the house.

"Well, now, that that's all fixed," said he, a minute later re-entering the room; "what's the matter with us all getting down to work? Here, Pancho, bring in the dinner, and you men draw up your chairs."

A young pig, roasted after the fashion of the country, had just been carved, and at the very moment when I was in the act of swallow-

ing a dainty morsel the report of a gun rang out.

“What’s the matter?” we all cried.

“The Spaniards—they are coming down both roads,” our orderlies answered.

“Confound it. I knew that would happen. Hurry up, we may have time to escape to horse,” exclaimed Fonts, rushing out of the house.

Too late, for hardly had we reached the hedge when the enemy came in sight and a rain of bullets filled the air.

“Get the horses in the house,” I shouted. “Close the windows and doors, Demetrio. For God’s sake, hurry.” The last to Cueto, who had commenced to return the fire.

Driving the horses into the dining room, we closed and barricaded the door.

“I knew it, I knew it!” exclaimed Fonts. “This meal will cost us our lives yet. Here we are caught like a lot of rats in a trap; you boys would——”

“Manuel, tie the horses to the hammock

rings. Spare the ammunition, boys, and aim carefully," cried Fonts. "Good for you, Demetrio," he continued, as the latter drew from under the cupboard a carbine and several cartridges.

By this time the enemy had surrounded the house, and the pit-pat of the bullets striking the stone walls sounded in rapid succession.

We were in all, counting Demetrio and his servant, seven able-bodied men, six armed with rifles. The attacking force amounted to about one hundred and fifty, but they were out in the open. The question was which would hold out the longer, the Spaniards or our ammunition.

There was only one weak spot in our fortification, namely, the door through which the Mauser bullets bored their way with anything but a pleasant sound. A window looked out from each side of the house except on that of the entrance, but upstairs a small round aperture overcame that difficulty, and there Demetrio and his man posted themselves.

For over two hours we held our own without loss. Then Cueto's horse, shot through the chest, broke loose in his dying struggles, and, staggering and kicking, overturned the table. The rest of the horses snapping their bridles in mad terror, reared and plunged about the smoke-clouded room. Leaning against the wall was Cueto, knotting a handkerchief around his head, which had been grazed by a bullet. Font, oblivious of everything but the enemy, was aiming and firing through the window, while anon the crack of Demetrio's rifle came from overhead.

After several attempts the horses were quieted, and the wounded ones put out of their misery; but our situation was so hopeless that for the first time during the war a feeling that all was over took possession of me. To add to our hopelessness night was close at hand.

As I looked on the scene and realized the plight to which our foolhardiness had brought us, a cry of pain came from above, followed by the sound of a falling body. A moment

later Pancho came down the stairs carrying Demetrio.

For a while no one spoke.

“You take his place, Robert, and Pancho will help you,” said Fonts presently.

But as he spoke there came through the door, with an angry snarl, poor Robert’s fatal bullet, and without a moan my servant dropped dead.

At that instant, as if mocking our situation, the sun sank below the horizon and darkness set in.

“For God’s sake, Cueto, look sharp and go upstairs, or they will have us,” shouted Fonts.

“I can’t,” moaned the poor boy. “My leg is shot through. I can hardly stand.”

“I’ll go, sir,” answered Pancho, rising from the side of Demetrio’s body.

“How many rounds have you, Cueto?” I asked, after finding that twenty-three was all that remained to me.

“Fourteen,” he faintly replied.

“Which, added to my eleven, makes just

forty-eight. Something must be done and quickly, or we are all dead men," exclaimed Fonts hoarsely.

The enemy now ceased firing. We blessed the breathing spell.

Never shall I forget that picture. Font's handsome face, hidden beneath the coating of dirt and black, appeared hideous through the gloom ; his eyes flashing with the light of a caged and frantic animal. Cueto, weak from the loss of blood, half sat, half reclined against the overturned table. Strewn all around were remnants of our dinner, broken chairs and shattered crockery ; stretched across the middle of the room was the carcass of the dead horse, while, to add to our wretchedness, the air was inconceivably hot and stifling, bitter with the taste of burned powder.

"Now, this is my plan," said Fonts, in a voice that cracked harshly over his parched tongue. "The next time they stop firing I will drop out of the window and attempt to steal through their lines. If successful, once

I reach the other side I will fire my revolver. They, thinking that some new force is attacking, will rush toward the sound. Then, seize your opportunity, and make your escape with Cueto. It is a desperate risk, but our only hope."

At the mention of Cueto's name, I turned just in time to see him drop slowly to the ground, where he lay moaning and bleeding to death. Instantly we rushed to help him; but before we reached his side there came from overhead a cry of warning:

"They're coming on again, all bunched for the door," cried Pancho, opening fire on the advancing mass.

We hurried back to our places and once more the fight raged. For awhile the enemy faced our volleys, then fortune smiled upon us and they retreated with their wounded.

"Now is my chance," muttered Fonts, springing to the window-ledge.

"Go easy and be careful," I cried, and with

a farewell nod he dropped to the ground and disappeared.

“God, I’m dying!” moaned poor Cueto, as I raised him from the floor.

Hastily calling the men, I bade one hold my horse while I mounted, and then pass up Cueto, now all but a corpse. Gently as possible I placed him on the front of my saddle, and encircled his body with my arm.

“Now, stand ready to open the door when you hear the signal. Then follow me, and each man for himself,” I ordered.

In that dark and smoke-filled chamber of death, and with my heart beating like a sledgehammer, I sat my horse and waited.

No noise disturbed the appalling silence save the hard breathing of the horses and an occasional groan from Cueto. Suddenly Cueto opened his eyes. His trembling fingers sought and closed over my hand, and he faintly murmured:

“Good-by, old man. God—bless—you. Don’t — let — them — have — my — body.

Well—'' A rush of blood filled his mouth, his body heaved and struggled in its last agony. As I stopped and kissed his cold cheek there sounded four rapid shots.

Back swung the door and out leaped my horse, followed by the two orderlies. Straight for the gate I rode. Then, as the firing came from the left, I turned in the opposite direction, and digging spurs into my horse, rode for my life.

The clatter of hoofs warned the enemy of our ruse, but save for a few scattering shots it was too late for them to act, and we soon were out of danger.

An hour later Fonts and I sat in front of our campfire. Beneath a tree, and covered by his blanket, lay all that remained of our comrade, while in the distance the flames of Demetrio's house leaped high in the air.

X.

A GUERRILLA BATTLE.

ONE bright, sunny afternoon in the month of March, a body of some one hundred and fifty Cuban cavalrymen might have been seen wending their way slowly across the sabanas of Cienfuegos, eastward bound.

One could see at a glance that these were hardened veterans. Unshaven faces, long hair and dirty, ragged clothes, stained by the clay-colored dust of the western provinces; tattered and bullet-pierced sombreros, thin and worn horses, made a sinister and gloomy picture, lit by the occasional glimmer of a polished and ever-ready rifle.

The little force rode in two groups, a squad of twenty-five men, about two hundred yards in advance, acting as a vanguard. At the head

of the main body, on a large black horse, rode a man about twenty-nine years old; dirty, tired, but soldierly looking. His large hat, bored in three places by bullets, flapped in the gentle breeze; around his neck a blood-stained bandage marked a recent wound, while a strap of his nickel-plated Winchester, as it hung across his shoulder, half hid an ugly rent in his *quayabera*. Such was the picture of General B. Zayas, "the bravest of the brave," as he rode at the head of all that remained of the ever-famous rear guard to General M. Gomez's historic invasion. Among that band were men who had fought two hundred times in sixty days. Many had been wounded. Yet they cared not, for to them it was a pleasure to fight; to die, a foregone and accepted conclusion. They smiled now when they looked back on the day of their first fight, when the whiz of bullets had caused them to tremble and lower their heads. To them a fight at lesser odds than four to one was child's play, and small wonder was it that they good-

naturedly chaffed the pacifico who seriously informed them that the Lequetia guerrilla was barely a league ahead.

"How many did you say they were, citizen?" inquired Zayas, slipping his feet from the stirrups and lazily stretching his long, thin legs.

"About three hundred all told, general," answered the pacifico, gazing with undisguised admiration at the young giant.

"Oh, all right! Thank you, my man. Forward!" he continued, and the little cavalcade pushed ahead once more, amid a cloud of slowly rising dust.

The famous Lequetia guerrilla, now a thing of the past, was at the time of this story the cause of much terror and grief. Composed chiefly of outlaws, negroes and Spaniards, it foraged on the neighboring estates and committed its butcheries unchecked. It had never been known to attack when evenly matched. Its custom was to ambuscade and cut to pieces small parties of a dozen up to fifty.

Let it be said, however, that among the officers of this band were men worthy of a better cause, who had enrolled through love of money or for family reasons; men who fought, imagining that that was their duty, and who looked with scorn and disgust at the savage actions of their companions. This band of plunderers and cutthroats took their name from a plantation where, after the day's foraging, it was wont to camp. But all things have an end in this world, and that end had arrived for the Lequetia guerrilla. The sun had sunk to a point in the horizon when its rays seemed to be kissing the leaves good-night. In the green fields the cows were pasturing, unmindful of war, and the wind sighed softly through the rustling cane leaves.

"*Diablo!* what is that?" asked Juan, the head scout, to his companion, lowering his leg from where it lay across the pommel of his saddle.

"It looks like the glimmer of a rifle barrel," answered the other, reining in.

"Ride back, José, and inform the general that an ambush has been placed ahead by the enemy," replied Juan.

"Not a shot is to be fired," said José, a moment later, falling into his place as unconcerned as though on parade. "The general says that it can be but the Lequetia guerrilla. Not a shot, but after their first volley we must charge. He will follow."

"*Bueno*, it sounds like old times. We have had a long rest, José, and my machete cries for work."

For sole reply José contented himself with loosening in its scabbard his long blade.

The word passed rapidly through the ranks that a brush was imminent with the enemy; but save for a hasty look or touch to their arms the men gave no outward signs of their feelings.

Juan rode first of all. Although not an officer, he had made the entire campaign with Zayas, and the latter had implicit confidence in his bravery and skill as a scout. So it was,

that without appearing to have noticed anything, and entirely ignoring the danger in which he was placed, he plodded serenely along, never touching or urging his horse.

The highway was lined on either side by small stumpy trees, about six feet high, their trunks thickly interwoven with the long, thorny leaves of *piña de raton*. From behind this hedge had come the glimmer which had caught Juan's quick eye and had caused him, with his accustomed shrewdness, to hit upon a plan worth two of theirs. A little way down the road he had seen a *portillo* (such as runaway cattle are accustomed to make in their efforts to break through a fence), of which he had decided to take advantage, and thus place himself on an equal footing with the ambushed enemy. Accordingly, when he reached the spot, he suddenly wheeled his horse, and leading the way, stepped through the opening.

For a moment the surprised guerrilla looked with wonder upon this unexpected flank movement, then, noticing the small number of the

vanguard, drew their machetes and scornfully dared them to come on. So easy a matter did it appear to the guerrillas that only half of their number prepared to give battle; the rest sitting on their horses and awaiting what they thought would be the natural outcome of the struggle. Little dreamed they that the hardened veterans of Pinar del Rio, Havana, and Matanzas were to be their antagonists.

For a moment both sides faced one another with drawn machetes, each waiting for the other to begin. It was, however, Juan's intention to draw on the Spaniards and give time for the now rapidly approaching main body to arrive, which idea he carried out.

With a graceful snake-like wave in their line alive with the flashing of arms, the Spaniards started slowly, then began to trot, and broke into a gallop as they came thundering down along the field, shaking the very earth and rent the air with their yells.

It was a situation to try the bravest among that little band, yet no one moved. Here were

four times their number charging toward them, and everyone knew that if the main body did not arrive in time it would go hard with them.

But Juan, looking over his shoulder, caught sight of the wild features of Zayas dashing through the opening at the head of his men, and the anxious look on his face gave way to one of joy. With but one cry of "Al machete!" which was taken up by every soul, Zayas darted ahead, and ere the enemy were aware of the arrival of reinforcements, both sides clashed together. The remaining division of Spaniards seeing the plight of their fellow-companions, hastily formed, and in less time than it takes to tell, flung themselves into the fray.

Not a shot was fired, but with a steady rhythmic movement the blades rose and fell, the rays of the setting sun playing upon them. The clash of steel, cries, oaths, shrieks and moans added to the horror of the scene. Little by little the swaying, pushing, struggling compact mass disentangled itself and opened,

everyone seeming to pick out his opponent and make the fight a personal affair. Many had dropped and lay writhing in their last agonies. Some were crawling on their hands and knees, digging their contorted fingers into the stony soil with the hope of escaping the merciless hoofs of the plunging horses. Just where the struggle had started lay the body of a horse, holding, pinned helplessly to the ground his unwounded rider, who frantically strove to free himself, calling loudly for help to his companions. Around him circled two combatants. Nearer and nearer they came, until with a sickening thud a horse's hoof crushed into the man's skull. A short distance away two men struggled in a frantic embrace, each as he held his foe by the throat, stabbing and cutting. Astounded at first by the bravery of their scanty opponents, the Spaniards fought well. Then, noticing the determination of the Cubans *to do or die*, they broke and ran.

On one side of the road were two men circling around and around each other, both

well mounted and able swordsmen. As they thrust, parried and cut, they made a fascinating sight. Now one would dash at his opponent, causing him to rein his horse onto his haunches in order to avoid the fierce assault, then he in turn would charge; and so it continued, till they two alone were left fighting, while all the others watched them breathlessly. The Spaniard was a lieutenant, as was the Cuban. Both were armed with Winchester rifles and machetes, but hitherto they had only made use of the steel. The struggle had lasted for some time, and the men were rapidly becoming exhausted. The Spaniard, being alone among the Cubans, could easily have been overpowered and captured, and in that manner an end be put to the duel. But Zayas was not the one to deny a valiant foe fair play, and accordingly kept at a distance awaiting the outcome. The men were now facing one another, their horses head to head, each as he momentarily rested eyeing his opponent, watchful of his every movement. Suddenly

the Cuban dug his spurs into his charger, and driving the point of his weapon into the nose of the Spaniard's horse, caused the brute to lower his head for a moment. In this moment he slashed fairly at his enemy's chest. Taken by surprise and somewhat thrown off his guard by the sudden movement of his horse, the Spaniard barely managed to raise his saber in defense. The blade, receiving the full force of the blow, parted as if made of lead, and before he could recover and wheel his horse the Cuban dashed by, thrusting to the rear as he did so and wounding his antagonist between the shoulder blades. The blood spurted in a great stream, and it looked as if the fight were at an end.

But not so. Like a flash the Spaniard grasped his unloaded rifle by the barrel, and, as his enemy returned to the attack, struck him a mighty blow upon the hip. Over into the pommel of the saddle went the victim, blindly swinging his machete as he fell from his horse.

A hasty examination showed two ribs broken

and before the doctor had finished bandaging him the lieutenant was inquiring about his plucky opponent.

"Done for, I'm afraid. That last thrust of yours caught him squarely beneath the arm, and he can't live thirty minutes," said General Zayas, grasping the lieutenant's hand.

With a grimace of pain the young man rose and limped over to where his less fortunate adversary lay dying. As he reached the man's side the Spaniard opened his eyes and, smiling grimly, whispered:

"You were a little too quick for me, but luck favored you. *Tio*. Lift me up."

"Are you in much pain?" sympathetically asked the Cuban, placing the Spaniard's head on a roll of blankets, and striving to stay the flow of blood with a wet rag.

"No—not much. My time is up, though," said the other, sinking back exhausted upon the blankets.

At that moment, as if heralding the depart-

ure of a brave man's soul, the bugle sounded "boots and saddles."

At the sound the dying man sat up, a thousand confused fancies crowding at his brain and throbbing at his heart. He saluted, and muttered:

"A caballo, señores, a caballo."

So died, unthought of and forgotten by his former companions, one of the bravest men who ever drew a saber in defense of the Spanish ensign.

XI.

THE KING'S BIRTHDAY.

AMONG all the many daring deeds of the late General Aranguren his capture of Fort Isabel undoubtedly ranks foremost of all. Up to the time of this event he was but one of the many young men struggling for General Gomez's approval, after this, however, his career was assured.

Recently promoted to the grade of captain, he was constantly on the lookout for an action which would earn him another star and make the Cuban forces ring with his name. Like all men of his class, he did not know fear, and the danger of death was never an obstacle in his path.

A few miles distant from Las Cruces, and protecting the railroad bridge, was Fort Isabel, garrisoned by Captain Garrido and twenty-five

Spanish soldiers. Aranguren and Garrido were friends of old but they never neglected an opportunity to match their strength. About six weeks previously to **this** story the Spanish officer had been captured by Aranguren. During his stay in the Cuban camp Garrido was warned by Aranguren against being so careless.

“For,” he said, “I am only setting you free so as to be able to capture you again. The next time, however, you will be *my* guest in *your* house.”

The following day Garrido was returned, unharmed, to his fort.

Several weeks went by, and then Aranguren’s opportunity arrived.

It was a well-known fact in the town of Las Cruces, and one which Aranguren had not been slow in finding out, that Garrido was madly in love with Rosita Ceballos, the daughter of a wealthy Spanish planter. In fact, his infatuation had gained such control over him that he frequently neglected his duties to call on his fair inamorata. Nothing was too good for

her, and the presents which he had given her, were the talk and envy of all the belles in the town. Old Ceballos, who hated the Cubans and their cause with all his heart, was not at all backward in showing his approval, and small wonder was it that Garrido allowed himself to be caught napping, when his cup of joy was filled by Ceballos giving his consent to their engagement. Garrido and his fair *fiancée* agreed to announce their engagement on the king's birthday, and to celebrate both *fêtes* by a magnificent display of fireworks. Accordingly Garrido wrote to a dealer in Havana and gave him an order which made him open his eyes and for a moment imagine that the good times were returning. Sky rockets, Roman candles, pin wheels, and, in fact, everything necessary for a gorgeous pyrotechnical display, were ordered by the dozens. Such a commotion as the arrival of all these articles created in Las Cruces could not pass unperceived, and the town soon became aware of the proposed festivities.

Aranguren, always well informed, at once learned of what was going on, and accordingly determined to act at once. On the morning of the king's birthday he camped within ten miles of the fort. After breakfast he called his two officers, Captain Herrera and Lieutenant Poe, and told them of his plan. At sunset he would break camp and march to within five miles of the fort, where he intended to dismount his men and proceed on foot to the attack.

"At that hour," he said, "all hands will be busily engaged in preparing for the *fête*, and it will be an easy matter for us to surprise them."

Both his officers agreed with him on the feasibility of the scheme, and it was at once decided upon.

At five o'clock that night the Cubans camped five miles away from Fort Isabel. The order was given to have the horses tethered and to form on foot at once. The men had not the slightest idea where they were bound to, but

their confidence in their young leader was so great that they would have followed him wherever he saw fit to lead.

"I want twenty-five volunteers," he said, not mentioning for what.

The entire squadron stepped forward.

"Well, you can't all go," he continued, with a smile. "Captain Herrera and Lieutenant Poe, you each pick twelve men. I will make the twenty-fifth with my orderly Juan."

It was a hard job, that of choosing from so many applicants, but it was at last accomplished, and a prouder set of men never stood before their commander. Every one of them could be counted upon to perform his duty, and Aranguren realized that as he looked them over.

"Right forward, fours right," and much to every man's surprise, they started out of camp on foot.

As such things will, the nature of our expedition soon leaked out, and many were the jests made at the expense of the *gringos*. An

hour of rapid marching brought them within sight of the fort, and the order to halt was given.

The sun had already gone down and darkness was setting in. The lamps were being lighted in Ceballo's house, and the preparations for the evening entertainment were far advanced. Here and there the forms of the Spanish soldiers moved hurriedly about, and occasionally the voice of Garrido giving an order faintly reached Aranguren's ears.

Motioning his men to remain where they were, Aranguren left them and advanced to reconnoiter. Ten minutes later he returned.

"The entire garrison, barring three men, are at the house," he said. "The surprise will be complete, and I think that we will not be forced to fire a single shot."

A short while later, darkness having set in completely, the order was passed to advance, and in single file the men crept forward.

Outside the hut the Spaniards had stacked their arms, Aranguren had counted them, and

they numbered exactly twenty-two. With the enemy in the house, and their guns outside, it looked as though the fight was already won.

“Surround the house,” ordered Aranguren, in a low voice. Hurriedly the men obeyed, keeping their eyes fixed on him.

For a moment he hesitated, and then stepped forward. All the men followed, rushing after him like a pack of lunatics, into the house, where, much to their surprise, they only found Garrido and four badly frightened Spaniards.

“You had twenty-two men here; where are they?” asked Aranguren, after he had recovered from his surprise.

“Gone for kindling wood, sir,” answered one of the men, not noticing Garrido’s signal to remain quiet.

“And will be back shortly,” finished Aranguren. “Sorry, Garrido, but I will be forced to bind your arms; just to insure your presence at your dinner. We will start at once if it is agreeable to you.”

“You might have chosen any other night on which to dine with me than this one,” answered Garrido, as he extended his hands to one of the men.

All this time Ceballos and his daughter had remained silent spectators; but now Rosita stepped forward.

“So you are going to spoil my party, are you?” she said, with a hasty look toward the door. “Will you not wait until after the fireworks before you take Pèpe away? Ah, but you will,” she continued, pointing to the door.

Outside the stack of arms had vanished. A second glance showed the very trees alive with them. Aranguren’s position was a dangerous one, caught in a trap as he was, but his quick-wittedness came to his aid. Catching Garrido by the arm he placed him in front of him, and ordering the men to follow, started out of the house. With cocked rifles the men followed, expecting to have to fight, but the Spaniards, with their commander thus exposed, did not dare to fire.

“Hurry up!” shouted Aranguren, “and overpower the men in the fort. Don’t fire unless you have to.”

Herrera at once shouted to his men to follow him, and started toward the fort. The Spaniards therein saw him coming and opened fire. Their shots went wild, and in less time than it takes to tell it, the Cubans entered the fort and overpowered its defenders. Meanwhile Aranguren with the rest of the men had nearly traversed the distance which separated the house from the fort, and not a single shot had been fired on either side. But now the Spaniards suddenly changed their plan and opened fire, wounding two of the Cubans.

“Fire! Fire on them!” shouted Aranguren. The men obeyed and the enemy retreated to cover.

Once inside the fort the doors were barricaded, and each man assigned to a post. The firing now became a general one, and volley after volley was exchanged. Fighting as they were in the open, the Spaniards were at a

great disadvantage, and they soon lost several of their men, which, however, did not seem to discourage them, for they repeatedly charged the fort, vainly attempting to regain control of it. After an hour of this sort of work, the Spaniards retired to the house, which they entered after posting a sentry at the door.

"They're planning an attack, and we must keep a sharp lookout to-night," said Aranguren. "The moon will be up shortly, and that will help us a great deal. How many rounds of ammunition have we, sergeant?"

"One hundred and three, sir," answered the man, after he had counted each man's supply.

"Just about enough to resist the next attack. I guess my men will spoil your little scheme, and Rosita will have her fireworks after all," remarked Garrido.

"You keep on thinking that way and you will be disappointed," answered Aranguren. "Sergeant, distribute the ammunition evenly, and keep a sharp lookout. Every shot must

be made to tell now. Well, what is it now, Juan?"

The orderly stooped and whispered in Aranguren's ear.

"By George, the very thing. I'll try it," and followed by Juan, he left the room.

At that very moment a shot rang out from above. Instantly it was answered by a volley from outside, followed by the pit-pat of the bullets as they struck the walls of the fort.

"They're coming on again, sir," cried the sergeant, looking through a loophole.

"Easy on the ammunition there, men," shouted Aranguren, from the kitchen. Here lend a hand, my man."

The enemy were apparently aware of the lack of ammunition, for they contented themselves with firing from a distance, and occasionally drawing the Cuban's fire by exposing themselves. Meanwhile Aranguren, aided by the sergeant, had been busy distributing odd-shaped bundles to each of the men, whispering an instruction as he did so. When he

had finished he gave the order to cease firing, which, when obeyed, caused the Spaniards to break out into cheers. Imagining that the Cubans were out of ammunition they instantly formed for a charge, and at the order advanced at a dog trot, breaking into a run as they neared the fort. Shouting like a lot of maniacs they swept forward in a final and plucky attempt.

“Now,” suddenly shouted Aranguren, when they were within twenty-five feet. “Touch them off.”

Barely had the words left his mouth when there followed the hissing of sky rockets and the sputtering of Roman candles. Hundreds of brightly colored fire balls shot out of the fort catching the enemy squarely in the face, burning them frightfully, and setting fire to their clothing. Half of the Spaniards fell to the ground, where they rolled in agony, calling pitifully for help, deserted by their comrades, who took to their heels, and who never stopped running until they reached Las Cruces, where they informed the commander that they had

been routed "by a large body of insurgents who used explosive bullets."

That ended the short fight. The wounded men were brought into their former home, where their wounds were dressed and an effort made to make them as comfortable as possible, and a messenger was at once sent to the main body to report at the fort. This they did shortly afterward.

One o'clock that night found five men and one woman seated around the table in the dining room of the fort. One of the men wore the Spanish uniform, but he appeared thoroughly at home, although surrounded by men who wore, in their hats, the Cuban cockade. The girl, dressed in orange and black, and wearing a black lace mantilla, had pinned to her left shoulder a large yellow and red streamer.

"Gentlemen," said Aranguren, rising; "let us drink to our host, who is *my guest*, and to his fair *fiancée*."

XII.

THE BATTLE OF CANTABRIA.

ONE of the greatest victories achieved by the Cuban army since the outbreak of the present revolution, was the battle of Cantabria, where Colonel Alfredo Rego, with eight hundred cavalymen, defeated a force of fifteen hundred Spaniards. Not only was the victory a remarkable one, but the incidents that followed give luster to the name of the Cuban commander.

Alfredo Rego, then acting as brigadier-general of the Cienfuegos briagde, was stationed at Los Pozos, a small stock farm about thirty miles east of Cienfuegos, awaiting orders from General Maximo Gomez, who was on the eve of his now historic march through the island. On November 3, 1895, Rego received word from the commander-in-chief to notify all

planters in his district engaged in the manufacture of sugar to close their mills within ten days. If the order was not obeyed Rego was to attack and destroy the estates. Upon receiving the printed slip issued by Rego, every plantation, with the exception of Cantabria, closed down. The insurgent leader waited the stipulated ten days, and then wrote a letter to the owner, saying that if his former order was not obeyed within the next twenty-four hours the estate would be destroyed.

“I am not a man who takes pleasure in destroying other people’s property, but a soldier, and as such must obey the orders of my superiors,” he wrote.

The courier who carried this final warning returned with the answer that more than fifteen hundred Spanish troops were awaiting impatiently the visit of the patriots. Rego at once set about to arrange for the coming encounter. Orderlies were dispatched in every direction, calling the various squadrons of the brigade, which were stationed at different

points in the district. Ammunition and such extra arms as could be obtained were distributed among the men. The sick, the wounded, and the unarmed men, together with the impedimenta, were sent to the Signanea Hospital. Rations were distributed for a three days' march, and an order was published notifying the men of the coming fight and appealing to them to do their duty.

On November 15 Rego broke camp at the head of eight hundred fully equipped men, and started on his march to Cantabria. Word of the preparations for the coming attack had reached the Spanish commander, and he was not slow in making ready for it. The entire plantation was surrounded by guards, and skirmishers were sent out to locate the advancing rebels. So it happened that Rego, who had counted upon allowing his men to have a night's rest before going into battle, was forced to attack at once. The fighting from the very start was fast and furious. Hidden in the dense canefields, where they could not

be seen, the Spaniards poured a steady fire upon the Cubans. Rego's men, although outnumbered and poorly armed in comparison with their opponents, fought gamely. During seven hours the uneven fight continued. Several machete charges were made, but without any result, as the horses were unable to break through the thick brush. The fight was going against the Cubans, who had lost more than one hundred and thirty men, and accordingly Rego determined upon a plan which up to this time he had not used.

Calling his officers about him he gave them orders to set fire to the canefields, and to form all their men on the top of Cantabria hill. A few minutes latter the sharp notes of the bugle sounded the retreat, and the over-confident Spaniards broke out into cheers at what they thought was the signal of their victory. Their triumphant shouts, however, were soon turned into cries of terror, as the rifle-like crackling of the burning sugarcane sounded around them. The entire plantation was soon wrapped

in flames. Overhead floated dense black clouds of smoke, through which faintly came the sound of the Spanish bugle and the cries of the panic-stricken enemy. Now and then a clearing in the smoke revealed the Spaniards rushing to and fro in their efforts to answer the call of "assembly."

Rego had drawn his men up in line of battle on the summit of the hill. With their commander at their head, the men waited silently for the final struggle. It came at last. Little by little the wind carried the smoke and flames across the fields. Almost at the very brow of the hill was the crippled Spanish force. Formed in a hollow square, five files deep, the enemy waited. Rego turned in his saddle and waved his hand. The bugle sounded "*al machete*," and before the notes had died away the Cubans charged down the hill.

Squadron after squadron the men raced down the incline. No sound was heard save the thud of hoofs and rattle of arms, as the first squadron, with Rego in the lead, neared the

square. As the Cubans approached the Spanish officers were heard shouting words of encouragement to their men. Nearer and nearer came the Cubans. A volley like a thunder-clap leaped from the square, followed instantly by a crash, as horses and riders dashed into the compact wall of flesh and steel. Like an avalanche the patriots tore and cut their way through the ranks. The cries of the wounded mingled with the shouts of rage and the clash of steel. Each man fought for himself, and for several minutes it was give and take; then the Spaniards broke and ran. That night more than a thousand guns lay piled before Rego's tent, and huddled beneath a large Ceiba tree were sixty-three prisoners of war. The insurgents had lost in dead and wounded nearly two hundred men. Forty-three Spaniards reached the village alive.

Now happened the action which has placed Rego in the foremost ranks of the men who fight for Cuban liberty. At daybreak on the following morning he sent a letter to Lieuten-

ant-Colonel Hernandez, then in command of the town of Cumanajagua, saying that he was prepared to return, unharmed, his sixty-three prisoners, provided he was allowed to enter the town with flying colors to do so. Word was received in reply that "the loyal troops of Spain will gladly receive and entertain so gallant and generous an enemy."

On November 17 Colonel Rego with his entire force appeared on the road leading to Cumanajagua. At his side rode the color bearer behind came his staff, which was in turn followed by the prisoners. As the patriot leader halted, scarcely fifty yards away from the fort, the flag of Spain was lowered and raised three times in salute. Lieutenant Colonel Hernandez, followed by his fellow-officers, then came forward, and in a few brief remarks thanked Rego for his generous act, and welcomed him to the town. Accompanied only by his color bearer and staff officers, Colonel Rego accepted the invitation given by the Spaniards to breakfast with them. During the meal the utmost good

fellowship prevailed, and only once was it marred by the action of a too ambitious subaltern. Rising from his chair, the young man proposed the health of the queen. Fearing some kind of treachery, the Cuban officers sprang to their feet. For a moment things looked dark, but with his customary tact Rego smoothed matters over.

“To the queen, gentlemen,” he said, raising his glass. “And now,” he continued, after the toast, “to our President and Cuba Libre.”

As Rego was preparing to leave the town a few hours later, his former prisoners crowded around him. Some kissed his hand, and others attempted to embrace him. Before leaving he gave to each one the sum of ten dollars and sixty cents. A few minutes later, amid cries of “Viva Cuba,” and “Viva España,” Rego and his little escort rode out of Cumanajagua and joined his men.

A short time afterward Rego received a letter from General Pando, offering him sixty thous-

and dollars and the rank of brigadier-general in the Spanish army if he would abandon the Cuban cause.

“I would have never acted as I did,” replied Rego, “if I had thought that this would have been my reward.”

Rego has since been promoted to brigadier-general, and is at the present time in command of the Cienfuegos brigade.

XIII.

PEABODY.

IN a quiet spot, shaded by a large Ceiba tree, near the river Hanabana, in the province of Matanzas, and surmounted by a plain board, is a small pile of stones. Burned into the wood are the following words:

“In memory of Peabody. Killed in action May 1, 1896. Erected by her friends in Squadron C., Fourth Brigade.”

Many have died fighting bravely for the solitary star of Cuba, but none ever served their country more patiently and faithfully than did poor old Peabody. She was only a mule, a plain, everyday, ordinary, awkward, stubborn brown mule. But as such she filled the important place of “ammunition carrier,”

and was never known to be missing when wanted.

Born in Cuba, her hopes were with her countrymen; and small wonder was it, that when pressed into the Spanish army, she availed herself of the first opportunity to offer her services to her flag.

It was at the battle of Palo Prieto, on November 14, 1895. The late Brigadier-General Bruno Zayas, with his troop of four hundred men, was stationed at the crossroads of Las Cruces and Santa Clara, defending General Serafin Sanchez's left wing. The fight had commenced at seven o'clock in the morning, at which hour General Molina, with a force three times superior in number to the Cubans, had attempted to cut to pieces the insurgent camp. General Sanchez, who unfortunately for the cause, was shortly afterward killed, had, however, received word of the enemy's approach, and had made his plans accordingly.

Palo Prieto is to-day well known to both sides; previous to this battle the Spaniards

were unaware of its existence. It lies in a valley formed by an almost complete circuit of hills, there being but two entrances, on the northwest and south sides of the field. On the latter side, and for a distance of no more than seventy-five yards, runs the river Hanabana. Beyond this, dotted here and there by small woods, stretches the open country, clear to the forts of Santa Clara. Into this enormous circle, General Sanchez, by a strategic movement, lead the enemy. Once within they were assailed by a tremendous fire, which poured from every crevice in the hills. The dangerous and all-important northwestern exit was intrusted to the care of Zayas and his famous "red troopers," so called on account of the appearance they presented, when covered with red dust, they answered roll call after the battle of Paso Real.

The troopers had defended nobly the pass all day. Time and time again the enemy had charged only to be driven back each time. Shortly after noon the ammunition began to

run low, and many were the coveted glances cast at the enemy's "ammunition mules," which, well protected, stood huddled together in the center of the Spanish square. Suddenly, and when Zayas himself had almost made up his mind to give the order to retreat, a commotion occurred in the enemy's ranks. The next second and the front of the square gave way as though pushed by a tremendous battering ram, and followed by eight of her companions, a large brown mule broke through the ranks and headed directly for the Cubans. In a twinkling of an eye each man ceased to fire, and breathlessly watched their approach. Straight for the troopers they came, never heeding the rain of bullets which their dismayed and former master sent flying after them, as they blindly followed their patriotic leader. In less time than it takes to tell they reached the Cubans, who welcomed them with three hearty and grateful cheers. The leader, who was at once christened Peabody, on account of the class of ammunition which she

carried, appeared to be thoroughly aware of her brave and timely action, as she calmly submitted to the tremendous rush which was made at her cargo. The fresh supply of ammunition decided the battle, and the Spaniards, throwing all honor to the winds, sought safety a few minutes later in an ignominious and disorderly retreat.

That night Peabody was duly christened and enrolled into the ranks of the "red troopers."

For many months after this Peabody served her troop and country well. Like all mules she had her tantrums, but Rafael, whose sole duty it was to look after and care for her, knew just how to handle her. If any dynamite was to be carried, Peabody was at once intrusted with it. No guide line ever held her head, no lash ever scarred her sleek sides. A word or call from Rafael was enough to let her know that she was outstepping her bounds and breaking a military rule.

During the march, no matter whether it was by day or by night, going into or coming out

of battle, when needed she was always at her place. Her large brown eyes would brighten up with a strange, human light when she was spoken to, and a kind word, or no matter how small a gift, never failed to bring a responsive and grateful rub of her soft, white nose.

Previous to going into battle alone did she seem to lose her customary placid manner. Then it was that strength was necessary to restrain her from following the vanguard into action. Once in a fight she was an example such as would strengthen the weakest heart. Just when the carnage and din seemed to be at its utmost, Peabody was to be seen at her post, directly behind the line of skirmishers; ready if needed, calmly nibbling the grass, and moving slowly about, perfectly heedless of the whizz and snarl of bullets, as she searched for tit-bits. Several times she was hit, and at the time of her death more than one furrow remained as a needless reminder of her gallant and useful services.

On May 1, 1896, General Zayas with his entire troop camped at Mi Rosa, a large estate in the province of Matanzas. He had just returned from Pinar del Rio, crossing General Weyler's famous trocha. At the last mentioned place the troop was forced to undergo a heavy fire, during which Peabody had her left ear broken by a Mauser bullet. Try as hard as he could, the doctor was unable to set the drooping ear, and from that day on Peabody's fine, intelligent face was marred.

Zayas had not been encamped more than two hours when he was told by a *pacifico* that General Palanga's guerrillas, over four hundred strong, was camped a league away at El Corojo. Although his force was greatly outnumbered, Zayas did not hesitate, but decided to remain and give battle in the morning, and thus, for once in his remarkable career, making a serious mistake; a mistake which was to cost the lives of many of his brave troopers and of Peabody.

The following day dawned beautiful and

clear. Not a cloud marred the horizon, as the sun in all her grandeur of light and warmth, rose majestically over the tops of the pine trees, and shone down upon our little camp, causing the myriads of dewdrops on the leaves and grass to twinkle and sparkle forth as many different little colored rays. Now and then the soft coo of a dove calling her mate mingled with the chirp of the *juitia*, as together they watched, in amazement, the busy scene. Horses were saddled, ammunition distributed, and all was made ready for the coming encounter.

Slowly the morning wore on, and still there was no sign of the enemy.

The sun had almost reached the zenith, and the heat was becoming unbearable, to both man and beast, when the first shot rang out. The next instant it was followed by a volley which tore the leaves from the trees and sent the twigs flying through the air.

The famous battle of Mi Rosa had begun.

With a coolness born of constant fighting

the troopers sprang to their horses' heads and awaited the order to mount, which the notes of the bugle soon gave, sounding clearly and merrily above the uproar.

Unable to cope from the very start with the tremendous force which attacked them, the guard was rapidly driven back into the camp, and the fire became a general one. The enemy surrounded Zayas on all but one side, the left flank, which was protected by a small wood. Much against his will, and customary mode of fighting, the general was obliged to form his force in a hollow square. During three long, horrible hours, and beneath a murderous fire, the men fought gamely, then their ammunition commenced to give out. The situation was a desperate one. As fast as a horse was killed his carcass was dragged to the front to serve as a barricade from behind which the men, stretched on the ground, fired.

During all this time Peabody had remained standing in the center of the square. Stretched at her feet was her faithful friend and master

Rafael. Every once in a while, especially so when a bullet passed unpleasantly near, she would move her head slightly, but barring this and an occasional pawing, she gave no outward signs of nervousness. Her pack had been taken off her, and she stood there, amid the dying and the dead, with the sun shining on her bright sleek sides, looking in amazement at the enemy. She was a picture which time itself will never efface from the memory of her companions on that day.

“Scarcely any ammunition left, sir,” said Sergeant Zamora, as he coolly blew through the rifle of his barrel.

“And not a horse fit to ride,” answered Zayas, looking dejectedly around. “By George, there’s Peabody sound and safe. Rafael, do you think you’re capable of riding her to General Aranguren’s camp for help? No one but you can ride her.”

Now Rafael had never been noted for any particular deed of valor; in fact, in a fight he was always conspicuous by his absence. But

maybe it was his beloved Peabody's example, or the surety that death awaited him if he remained where he was, that made him answer in the affirmative to the general's question.

"Then ride at once, and as fast as she can carry you to General Aranguren. Tell him how we are fixed, and to come at once with his troop," said Zayas.

Peabody appeared to realize the situation, for contrary to her custom she made no resistance when the bridle was slipped into her mouth, and when Rafael vaulted on to her back.

"Now go, and ride for your lives," cried the general, as the boy turned her head.

The next instant they were off. No human power will ever convince the red troopers that Peabody was not aware of her errand. The second the spur touched her she shot from the square. With outstretched head, and muscles strained to their utmost, she plied her dainty little hoofs, in one frantic effort. No thoroughbred ever responded more gamely, or more determinedly. A parting shot from the

enemy pierced her neck, but she did not appear to mind it as she tore along the path through the woods and into the highway.

General Aranguren, with four hundred men, was camped at La Yaya, a little over two leagues away. Never during the entire distance did Peabody relax her speed, and in an incredibly short time, Rafael reached Aranguren's camp. News of the fight had reached there, and Rafael found the entire squadron formed and ready to march. Five minutes later they swung into the road, to reinforce their hard-pressed companions.

Much to Rafael's terror Aranguren placed him in the vanguard to lead the way; and thus it was that not only did Peabody go for help, but also did she lead it back.

As they neared the scene of action it became apparent by the firing that the Cubans were more than hard pressed. The sharp volleys of the Spaniards were only answered anon by the red troopers. The time that it had taken the

relief to arrive had served to make its aid all the more needed.

The dead and dying troopers scattered hither and thither, mingled with the carcasses of horses, bullet-torn saddles and useless machetes and guns. Open ammunition pouches, strewn promiscuously about proved how desperately and hungrily the men had searched for shells. The very pose of the bodies showed how the men had fought to the bitter end. On the outer edge of the square a trooper lay stretched beside his horse. Both were dead—pierced by the same bullet. The man had evidently just fired his last shot, for his hand was partially hidden in a dead comrades ammunition pouch, searching for the shell which death prevented him from ever finding. A short distance off a sergeant, a mere boy, whose right arm hung limp and bleeding, vainly attempted to ease the sufferings of his dying charger, shot through the breast. Now and then there came from beneath a pile of motionless figures a puff of

smoke, as with a last effort a trooper fired his parting shot. Grit and determination was written on the smoke-begrimed faces of the men as they carefully aimed and answered the death-dealing volleys of the Spaniards. Such was the condition of the squadron when Aranguren's troopers, with Peabody still proudly in the lead, emerged from the woods.

The hard-pressed men saw them, and a faint shout of joy arose from the square. A charge alone could save the day, and the preparatory orders were accordingly given. Line after line, troop after troop, the men formed, eager to avenge their dead comrades.

Quick to act, the enemy rallied their skirmishers and fired at the reinforcements.

Two shots struck Peabody ; one in the shoulder, the other in the chest. For a second she remained motionless. Then, as she began to totter, a look of sorrow and amazement came into her soft brown eyes. Slowly one knee bent, as though loathe to lower that proud head, then the other gave way, and poor Pea-

body rolled to the ground. Feebly and vainly she struggled to rise, two large tears trickling down her face, as her efforts grew weaker. Her eyes, over which Death was rapidly drawing his mantle, turned toward her troopers, as though saying farewell to the men whose lives she had saved with her own.

Slower and more faintly beat her honest heart as the bugle sounded the charge. Then, as the squadron swept by in all its glory of life and strength, Peabody died, lulled to sleep by the victorious cries of the charging troopers.

XIV.

GOD'S VICTORY.

It was a hot cloudy day, and the dust which the horses raised filled our eyes and dried our throats.

That morning at eight o'clock we had broken camp, and it was now three o'clock, with no prospect of ever coming to a halt. The men, accustomed as they were to hardships and to blind obedience, were commencing to murmur, while to add to our misery, several of the horses had almost given out, and their riders were forced in order to save them to dismount and walk by their sides. Colonel Roja, himself, as he rode a few yards ahead of us, presented a sad and bedraggled appearance, as, covered with dust and with his left leg slung across the pommel of his saddle, he swayed

from side to side, keeping time to the regular motion of his horse.

A week previously we had received dispatches from General Gomez for General Maceo, with orders "to deliver them at once and return." It meant a ride of over four hundred miles through the provinces of Matanzas and Havana, across the "trocha," and halfway into Pinar del Rio. A most dangerous commission, for although we were four hundred strong, we would have to cross time and time again the enemy's territory. Only certain places were safe enough to allow us to camp, and as on this eventful day it sometimes happened that they were leagues apart.

My horse, Senator Sherman, was beginning to tug at the reins, and knowing the little fellow's signal of distress I decided to give him a rest. Calling André, my orderly, I handed the bridle to him, then tucking my machete and Winchester one under each arm, I tilted my hat over my eyes, and plodded along with the rest of my men. A half-hour later and

everybody including Roja had done likewise.

“Pretty tough work this marching,” drawled Lieutenant Dudley, wiping his face with a much-faded silk handkerchief.

I nodded by way of reply. I was too busy trying to carry my weary body along, not to mention my many and heavy accoutrements, to make any other reply. It was different with Dudley. He was an Englishman, and like the majority of his race, big and strong. Poor fellow, a saber thrust settled his fate six weeks later, and deprived me of one of my best friends.

“Better try a cigarette, old chap, it will soothe your ruffled spirits,” he continued, as with a flourish which smacked of former days he passed me his dented cigarette case. “I wonder where he’s taking us to at this rate?” he added, blowing a cloud of smoke in Roja’s direction.

“I don’t know, unless it is to San Miguel; that is the only camp safe enough for us around here,” I replied.

For several minutes we walked along in silence, during which time I managed to stumble repeatedly, thereby causing myself to waste much breath in denouncing a government which so far neglected its highways as to cause an officer in the republic's service to endanger his life by walking upon them.

"Notice anything unusual about the colonel?" asked Dudley, as he wasted some of his superfluous strength by kicking along in front of him a green mango. "Acting very strangely to-day. Eh, old man?"

"Well, he's never been the same since that wound on his neck," remarked Captain Cabrera, as he joined us. "That was wound number two, and he claims that number three will finish him."

"Well, I hope not," replied Dudley, and once more we walked along in silence. Shortly afterward San Miguel came in sight and twenty minutes later, after nearly twelve hours of steady marching, we went into camp.

I had just finished watching André attend to

the feeding and bathing of my horse, and had told him how I wanted my dinner, when the colonel's orderly appeared.

"You're wanted at the colonel's tent, sir," he said, saluting. With a final look at Senator Sherman, who stood calmly in the shade eating his dinner, I hastened to obey the colonel's summons. There I found Captain Cabrera and Lieutenants Molina and Dudley. Twenty-four hours later, and Dudley and I were to be all that remained alive of that little group.

"Gentlemen," said the colonel, after he had motioned us to be seated; "my position is a most delicate one. As you know I carry dispatches of the utmost importance to General Maceo. Dispatches, such as should they fall into the hands of the enemy would do us the utmost harm. General Pando with his troop is camped half a league away. I am trying to avoid an encounter, but I fear it is impossible. Should I be unsuccessful and anything happen to me, may I count on you, one and

all, to guard these despatches and deliver them, cost what it may?"

"Yes, sir, you may," we answered in unison.

"Thank you, gentleman, that is all," he answered, a sad smile lighting up his sun-burned face.

"Didn't I tell you that something was wrong with the old man?" said Dudley, slipping his arm around mine as we walked away.

"It's only a foolish superstition," I replied. "A man can't lead this life all the time without getting, once in a while, the blue devils. How about breakfast?"

"The same as I have had for the past week; roasted meat and roasted potatoes?" he answered, with a hungry sigh.

"Share my dinner then. André has something better than that."

"Delighted, old chap. What time do you dine?" he answered.

"When it so pleases André. Come along."

A short while after our scanty repast we were joined by Cabrera and Molina, two of

the bravest and finest fellows that it was ever my fortune to know.

Cabrera, who was no more than twenty-two year old, was famous the island over for his daring deed at La Mandinga. He was a second lieutenant at the time. A charge had been ordered by General Gomez. At that very moment a volley from the enemy wounded both of Cabrera's superior officers. Without a moment's hesitation, he jumped in front of the men and gave the order to charge. The men at first obeyed, but as they neared the enemy's line, and began to feel the effects of their fire, they wavered and finally came to a dead halt. Cabrera ordered and begged them to follow him. All in vain, they would not budge. With a final word of entreaty, Cabrera dug the spurs into his horse, and alone charged the enemy. Three bullets struck him, but he never faltered. To men of such caliber death is better than disgrace. Barely thirty yards separated him from the enemy, when his example told on his men, and with a cry of

“Viva Cuba,” they followed him. When picked up after the battle, Cabrera was wounded in five places. That night Gomez himself went to the hospital and promoted him to the rank of a captain.

No one to look at him would have thought that he possessed even the ordinary amount of courage.

His face was like that of a woman's, smooth and even featured, with large brown eyes that were never meant to look upon the horrors of war; while to complete the delusion, his voice had a decided girlish ring to it. Sad as a rule, his entire demeanor would change at the first notes of the bugle, and he would ride into battle at the head of his men, his cheeks flushed with excitement, and his every motion betokening a soldier. He and Molina were inseparable, and it was no unusual thing to see them attempting, in an off-hand manner, while under fire, to shield one another from danger. It is at the front where true friends are to be found; it is there also where the clasp of the

186 IN THE SADDLE WITH GOMEZ.

hand and the word friend has more than its ordinary meaning.

During two hours we sat around the fire talking. No mention was made of the possible encounter in the morning, we had long since become used to such things, but like all mortals who delight in making themselves miserable we spoke of former good times and of the black prospects of the future.

While thus engaged the faint notes of a bugle carried across the fields by the breeze reached our ears.

"General Pando's bugle sounding 'taps,' " exclaimed Cabrera.

"And there goes ours," growled Molina, as the bugler stepped into the center of the camp. The next instant and the call re-echoed through the hills, impudently defying our foes. With a whispered good-night my companions left me alone with André, who, wrapped in the arms of Morpheus, lay stretched beneath my hammock.

A true cavalryman never turns in without

first seeing to his horse's comfort, and not wishing to awaken my faithful darky, I threw my poncho over my shoulders in order to protect my only suit from the wet guinea grass, and started to say good-night to Senator Sherman.

I found him as usual, calmly eating. Of all the horses to have an appetite, Senator Sherman certainly took the medal. Rain or shine, heat or cold, nothing in fact could interfere with it. Dear little friend, you settled all your debts to me when, on that memorable day at La Estrella, your nimble legs saved my life.

On the way back I chanced to pass by the colonel's tent. Much to my surprise I found him leaning against a tree, smoking a cigar. I saluted, and was about to pass on, when he called me.

"The papers are in my saddle bag; the one on the left," he said, pointing to where his saddle lay slung across a pole. "You will find them there when all is over."

I was about to reply when he turned

abruptly on his heel and walked away. Wondering at what the morrow would bring us, I returned to my hammock and made ready to "turn in." Ten minutes later I was asleep.

I awoke to the sound of "reveille," at half-past three, to find it raining. Judging from the appearance of the ground it had evidently been doing so for several hours, but the march of the previous day had so tired me that it is hard to say just what would have awakened me. I sent André after my horse, and set about unslinging my hammock and rolling it; no easy matter, for what with the dew and the rain it was fairly well soaked. I had barely finished when my orderly reappeared with Senator Sherman, none the worse for his damp night's rest. In less time than it takes to tell he was rubbed down, saddled and tied to the bough of a neighboring tree.

At four o'clock the order to "fall in" was given, and for a moment the hubbub of voices was drowned by the trampling of horses and the clanking of spurs and arms.

“Attention! Prepare to mount! Mount!” and four hundred men swung simultaneously into the saddle. At that very moment, and as though acting as a forerunner to the memorable day which had just dawned, the rain commenced to come down in torrents. The ink-black clouds were parted here and there by vivid flashes of lightning, and peal after peal of thunder re-echoed about us; while to add to our misery the wind, which up to that time had been fairly moderate, increased in force and drove the rain in blinding sheets against our faces. Leaves, twigs, and, in fact, everything which the wind could wrench from the ground, went sailing through the air. Now and then the rain would let up a bit, only to be started afresh by a clap of thunder which seemed to shake the very earth. All this time the squadron, drawn up in a long sinuous line stood at attention, the water running in little streams from every angle of the men’s bodies. Occasionally a horse, made nervous by the tedious wait and rain, would rear and plunge,

causing the line to undulate like the coils of some large serpent.

Dudley, a few feet away from me, sat his horse and appeared totally indifferent to everything except a piece of straw, upon which he was arduously chewing. In answer to a look of inquiry which I gave him, he withdrew the straw from his mouth long enough to tell me that the colonel was waiting for the scouts to return.

An hour went by and then they appeared, coming down the road at a sharp pace. Instantly everyone braced up. Something was going to happen. One of the scouts, a corporal, rode up to the colonel and made his report. Several times during the conversation he pointed to a field over a mile square which lay a short distance to our right. When the colonel had heard all the man had to say he dismissed him and sent for Cabrera and I.

"I was mistaken in the identity of the force ahead of us," he said. "They are the *guardia civiles* of Santo Domingo, and are about five

hundred strong. I cannot imagine who is in command of them, for according to the last report which I received, their leader, Colonel Suarez, was ill. At any rate they are coming this way, and I propose to exchange a few shots. Each of you will take your respective troops, and after dismounting your men, post yourselves behind the stone wall on the south side of yonder fields. I will, with the rest of the force, station myself in the center of the field."

"Dear me, more dirty work," exclaimed Dudley, when I told him of the order. "Why, my boots are nearly gone, and this will surely finish them. What a disgraceful predicament for one of her majesty's subjects," and he groaned aloud as he obeyed my order to dismount. Leaving twenty-five men to look after the horses, I formed the rest in a column of fours and gave the order to march. The rain had not ceased, and the road was ankle-deep in mud, but that was better than dust, and the men did not appear to mind it much.

A better ambush could not have been wished for. In front of us stretched the open field, smooth and level as a billiard table, while the large trees which grew all around us screened us completely from the advancing enemy.

I ordered the men to place themselves where they wished, but not to fire until I so told them. Dudley, who was a capital shot, at once scrambled up a mango tree and straddled a branch. Several minutes of confusion ensued, during which Cabrera appeared and posted his men about one hundred yards further up the fence, then all once more became quiet. I picked out a place in the wall, directly beneath Dudley's tree, with a splendid loophole, and stretching myself on the ground, awaited developments. They came sooner than I expected.

"I say, old chap," suddenly cried Dudley from above, "this blooming branch is wobbling in a deuced awkward manner. I think you'd better move, don't you know."

I "knew," and consequently moved several feet away. In this manner and in the utmost quietude, a half-hour was passed; then there appeared in the ranks of the colonel's men that wave of nervous excitement which always denotes the approach of the enemy. Surely enough, a few seconds later and they appeared, marching in splendid order, a quarter of a mile down the road. Fifty feet ahead of them rode their scouts. Five all told they were; each man a model of discipline. Straight as reeds they rode, with the butts of their carbines resting on their knees, ready for instant action. Nearer and nearer they came, until we distinctly heard the creaking of their accoutrements and the trampling of the horses. Both sides were now visible to one another, yet neither one opened fire. When they reached the entrance to the field, fifty yards from my men, the scouts halted and waited for the main body to come up. Then, all massed, they stepped across the opening and on to the field.

I looked at the colonel. Stretched out on

his horse, the nickel-plated barrel of his Winchester rested between the ears of his well trained mount. As I looked there came a puff of smoke, a cry from a wounded Spaniard, answered by the roar of two hundred Cuban rifles, and Colonel Roja's last fight was on.

I waited until all of the enemy's force had entered the field, and then gave the order to fire. Cabrera at once followed suit. Instantly a bugle sounded, and over two hundred Spaniards swung around in perfect order and faced us. The rest proceeded a few yards when they halted and deploying as skirmishers, opened fire on Roja's men. I had taken an active part in many skirmishes with Spanish cavalry, but up to that time I had never been so fortunate as to encounter Spain's famous *guardia civiles*, and I can truthfully say that a finer set of men it would be very hard to find. They are indeed worthy of the praises which their countrymen bestow upon them. Several times during this encounter orders requiring difficult evolutions were given, and each time

they were obeyed with that wonderful coolness and accurateness which denoted the thoroughly drilled and disciplined soldier.

Protected as we were by the stone wall, we had our opponents at a great disadvantage, and before long we had emptied several of their saddles. At first the Spaniards fired from their horses, but after a short while they dismounted and stretched themselves in the grass, where it became more difficult to hit them.

Soon after this maneuver I nervously noticed that their entire fire seemed to be directed toward the spot where I had stationed myself. Somewhat dismayed at this discovery I peered over the top of the wall. Directly in front of me, and about one hundred and fifty yards away, walked a Spanish soldier. As I looked he shouted an order, and pointed with his saber to the tree above me. The next instant he clapped his hand to his side, tottered and fell.

“By Jove! pinked at last. You cost me

three shots, old man, but I popped you at last," drawled a voice from above.

The mystery was explained; Dudley's shooting was making them nervous.

"Come down from there. You'll get killed," I shouted.

"By Jove! what an unkind and jarring remark to make, old chap. Just you——"

But the rest of his speech is lost to history, for the next instant there came from over my head the sound of cracking wood, a wild yell, followed by the thump of Dudley's enormous frame upon the ground.

"Are you hurt?" I exclaimed, mentally thanking my stars that he had not landed upon my back.

"De-ar me," he gasped; "lucky you mo-ved old chap-pie. Blooming old stick wobbled and wobbled until it cracked in two."

His experience had, however, been a lesson to him, and he contented himself from that time on with fighting from *terra firma*.

Immediately afterward the firing became too

hot to allow of any conversation, but every once in a while Dudley's "By Jove!" would reach me through the fire and smoke.

An hour went by in this manner, with no visible advantage to either side. One of my men had been killed and three others wounded, but in return we had placed *hors de combat* seven of theirs. Just when I was wondering how long I would have to hold this position, Sergeant Zamora rode up and told me that the colonel's orders were for me to mount my men and rejoin him at once.

Something had occurred, I concluded, or else the old fellow would never have changed his plans, and accordingly I hastened to obey.

As our two troops galloped on to the field, I noticed that many of our horses were trotting aimlessly about without their riders. We had evidently met our match in marksmanship.

Roja saw us coming and the order to "assemble on the left skirmisher" sounded on the bugle.

The firing had ceased completely, and both

sides were now massing for the final test. Scarcely three hundred yards separated us, and a more imposing sight I have never witnessed. The dead and wounded of both sides lay directly between us on the muddy ground. The thick smoke curled in heavy clouds along the ground, wrapping itself in fantastic shapes about the horses' feet, and inclosing like a phantom mantle the rain-soaked forms of the men. Surprised at the comparative silence which now followed, the riderless horses ceased their mad race and drawing nearer, halted on our flanks, and watched in amazement the strange sight.

Both sides, now formed, awaited the signal. The commands "draw sabers" and "prepare to charge" followed in rapid succession. The Spanish officer turned in his saddle and said a few words to his men. The next second their bugle sounded the charge, and with a long, graceful wave their line sprang forward. Simultaneously with their first movement, Roja, with a sweep of his machete, gave the signal,

and with a shout that shook the very heavens we charged.

Like two colossal machines, and as though impelled by the same power, both sides swept on. The thundering of hoofs, the rattling of arms, and the wild shouts of the troopers, rose clearly above the noise of the storm. Nearer and nearer drew both sides, louder and louder grew the yells of the men, until with a crash which seemed to lift my horse off the earth, Spaniards and Cubans met.

I caught one glance of Dudley lifting his long machete, to ward the blow aimed at him by the Spanish officer, and then there followed a noise such as no human power can ever equal, and I knew no more.

How long I lay there I know not. I awoke to find Dudley sitting on the ground directly opposite to me with his face buried in his hands. A heavy odor such as can only be compared to that caused by the bursting of a dynamite bomb, and the smell of burned flesh at once assailed my nostrils. Every bone in

my body ached, and my throat was so parched that I could hardly move my tongue.

“For God’s sake what has happened, Dudley?” I faintly asked.

At first he did not move, then he slowly lifted his head and in a half-frightened manner looked at me.

“Thank heaven, old man, I once more hear your voice,” he cried, as he sprang toward me. “We were struck by lightning, and there are only a few of us left alive to tell the tale.”

After a few minutes I was able to sit up, and to listen to what he had to say. According to what he remembered, a bolt of lightning had fallen between both sides at the very moment that they had met, and almost before a blow had been struck. Nearly everyone was rendered senseless by the shock, or killed instantly. Those who were spared were too much frightened to continue the fight. These were now huddled together in two separate groups, not knowing exactly just what to do. On every side lay shapeless and charred fig-

ures, while in the spot where the bolt had fallen a sickening mass was piled. An appalling silence reigned; and everyone appeared to be struck dumb before the proof of God's inscrutable power.

Roja, Cabrera and Molina had been killed. We find their bodies at the head of the troop, frightfully mangled.

Let us pass over the sad scene which followed. Suffice it to say that a truce was declared, the dead buried, and the wounded cared for. After that both sides left the field.

The dispatches for which so many brave men had perished were totally destroyed, and we thus deprived of ever being able to fulfill our promises.

That night many miles separated us from the ill-fated field.

"You and I alone now, old chap," said Dudley, as the notes of "taps" died softly away.

"And to the end," I answered, as I grasped his outstretched hand.

THE END.



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